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WILLIAM MORTON PHILIPS.

LADY GRIZEL.

An Expression of a Momentous Epoch.

BY THE
HON. LEWIS WINGFIELD,
AUTHOR OF "SLIPPERY GROUND," ETC., ETC.

" 1 *Witch*—When shall we three see again
An easy and a peaceful reign?
2 *Witch*—When the hurlyburly's o'er,
When this Wilkes shall be no more.
* * * * *
Tho' the land may not be lost,
Yet it shall be faction-tossed."

MACBOOT, A Tragedy—A.D. 1763.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

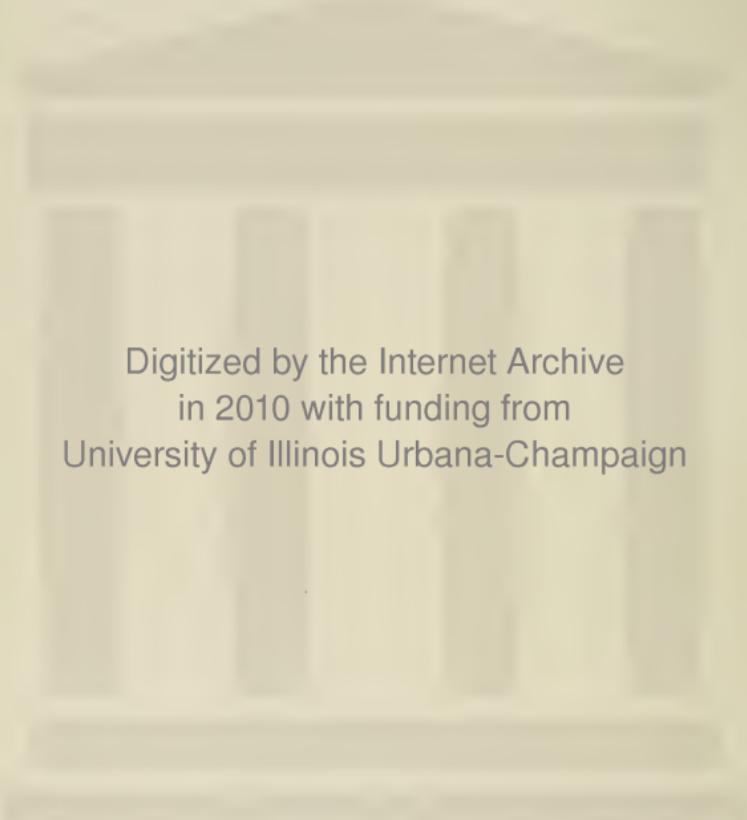


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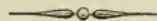
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LADY GRIZEL.



CHAPTER I.

CONFIDENCES.

 HE last action of hoary old David was one of the best of his life ; for he summoned together his remaining shreds of strength in order to secure the future comfort of Abishag, who had cherished him in his dotage. The effort had been no light one. But perhaps it was rendered the less arduous by the fact that his love and his hatred were walking side by side. His dearly-beloved wife was endowed with Tewkesbury House in London ; Tewkesbury House at Bath ; Tewkesbury Castle in the country ; all the fat Tewkesbury acres, and the rents accruing therefrom ; whilst Mr. Meadows, the heir-at-law, was left penniless.

When the name was signed and duly witnessed, the old Duke tumbled together in a heap; and the Duchess, seeing Anagke the vengeful one permanently foiled, regained her presence of mind. It had seemed to her that the capricious goddess was on her track again; that the trail, lost for a moment, was being pursued with redoubled ardour. But it was not so. All was safe. The will lay upon the table complete, and Anagke was discomfited. Her courage returned, and her spirits rose. Strange! In considering the goddess of necessity, concerning whom Mr. Pitt had first instructed the Duchess, she invariably contemplated a vengeful deity—one who looks on mankind not with the calm eye of destiny, but as a toy to be beaten, harried, bullied through life's span—one whom it is needful in self-defence to cheat, hoodwink, battle with by means of any stratagem or trick. If she was right, then what an edifying prospect do the stars look down upon! A weird unequal war of the strong against the weak, the far-seeing against the blind, the frail against the stalwart—of struggling pygmies striving vainly to push aside the impending heel of the most vulgar petty tyranny. Against such a tyranny sure it would be virtue to rebel even if certain death were the consequence; and much of the singular conduct of the Duchess, her wild and reckless carelessness, her bitter moods, her lax principles, must be attributed to the Moloch she elected to worship.

There was an implacable enemy hovering above holding by a thread a sword. It was so cruel of the powerful deity to hold that sword at all, that it was fair to add a surreptitious string or two by any means whatever in order to delay as long as might be its eventual fall. A good stout string and the fact of the sword was for the moment forgotten. She could dance and gambol under its threatening point. By-and-by, looking up she would perceive that the threads were frayed. Was it too late to splice the yarn? At any rate it was worth the effort.

The state of the law during the greater part of the eighteenth century was in many ways responsible for the singular creed which generally obtained. Its severity served but to brutalise. People began to be aware that civilisation had retrograded grievously during the last hundred years or so. To look on the day of Elizabeth and on their own, was to contemplate old Rome before and after the irruption of the Barbarians. It really appeared as if England were drifting back to barbarism. There was a sublimity about the grand way in which Queen Bess chopped people's heads off, quite different from the horrid, cold-blooded shambles which her country had become. When such a head as that of Mary Stuart rolled, by her order, from the block, it was a fearful text from which an awe-inspiring lesson might be drawn. What lesson

save that of callousness could be learnt from a daily hanging up like herrings of miserable wretches by dozens whose crime was petty larceny, and who, thanks to St. Giles's bowl, went jovially hiccupping into the presence of their Maker ? The whole thing was degrading to all parties. It served, however, to instil into the minds of high and low a belief in a presiding ogre, whose delight is human sacrifice and the flare of reeking altars. With such a belief as the basis of action it is little wonder that principles were low, that austerity such as that of Mr. Pitt was an enigma, that the masculine character (pure enough beneath the weeds) of Lady Grizel, should feel a fierce pleasure in skirmishing with the butcher deity.

The unconscious Duke was borne away to his chamber, whither the Duchess followed. Jasper, faint and ill, sat alone among the wooden flutes and cupids as motionless as they, long after the guttering candle had shot up in a flame and then expired. The moon rode to the summit of the blue highway, then moved downward on the other side, glancing as it moved at the speechless panting figure on the great bed under the feathered canopy, surmounted by emblazoned arms and strawberry leaves. The first white shiver of dawn was stealing over all when the Duchess re-entered the reception-room. She walked swiftly for awhile to and fro in thought, her arms crossed upon her bosom, her chin upon her

breast. The rustling of her rich skirt soothed her brother in his uneasy sleep—he dreamed of purling brooks and waving trees as he lay in the Duke's state-chair—his brows knit, his lips parted, his face wan from loss of blood. The Duchess stopped and bent over him. One hand was pressed on his wounded side—the other clutched the parchment upon which so much depended.

“This is the only friend I have on earth,” she murmured.

Then her thoughts wandered in a maze. As she stopped now and then to interrogate the features of the sleeper, the expression on her face changed. She strove to read her own heart, but could not. It was with a shock of mingled horror and surprise that she realised the redoubted Scratchpole to be no other than her brother. Now she understood for the first time whence came the money which in days gone by she helped to squander. A common thief—a pilferer of pockets! He—Lord Gowering's son! Her family pride rose in rebellion at the proposition; for, unlike her friends Ashe and Ancaster, she was not the least sentimental; her clearer intellect refused to envelope the collectors with the fashionable frippery of romance, for she failed to see that the fact of going on horseback made much difference between the doings of a footpad and of a highwayman. Modish dames were in the habit of weeping bucketfuls over the sorrows

of the one, who could not squeeze the tiniest sympathetic tear for the other. To my Lady Grizel both were alike noisome vermin, which in small quantities must be permitted to exist.

Jasper then, to whom she clung instinctively as a mainstay, was a robber. He—who missed being Lord Gowering but by the thickness of a wedding-ring. Jasper, whom she genuinely loved as much as her distorted character permitted her to love anything, might some day be swinging in chains by Thames-side. She shuddered at the prospect, and resumed her march more rapidly. After all, in what was he worse than she? The soul's monitor within her bosom, who spent so much of his time in sleep, opened his eyes for an instant.

“No. Of the two I am the worst,” she said to herself in scorn. “If all the truth were ever to come out, what a display of turpitude! Yet is it not my fault. This is the devil's realm, and we must be content to use his weapons. To baffle art by policy, and snare by fraud, is the daily work of the children of Mammon, who are wiser, we are told, than the children of light. We started on the same terms —both of us penniless; he gifted with courage, I endowed with beauty; what were we but common adventurers in search of fortune? I am worse than he, because I have suffered overmuch to be particular; more, much more than he can have done.” Then, the feminine part of her character assuming

the mastery for a moment, a swell of admiration surged over her. Brave manly Jasper, whose pseudonym was the terror of the town ! What a pity he should be a thief. The deeds of Scratchpole, though, had been such as to enforce respect. Stooping she kissed his forehead, and he awoke.

The clouds of morning parted. The rosy young sun cast streams of golden light into the room as Jasper looked up in his sister's face and remembered all. There were lines of fatigue about her eyes, of haggard thought about her lips. The Tower of Babel was untidy and awry ; the ranks of dahlias so dilapidated as to have melted her friseur to tears. She laid a hand upon his head.

“Brother,” she said abruptly, “I have been thinking whilst you slumbered. I do not often think, for the process is unpleasant to one situated as I am. Listen. The Duke is dead—the kind old man. Thank God, he blessed me ere he died.” She stopped short, and whisked round her train with a scoffing laugh, “What have I to do with blessings ! While he lived I had a plain duty to perform which came to be a pleasure—which kept me straight. Oh, Jasper ! when I think of what I might have been, how I do hate that man—that little selfish prim Lord Bellasis ! How is it that he, mean little wretch, should have been able to wreck the life of such an one as I, who am worth three of him ? Do you know that if things had turned out

differently I might haply have developed into a saint to be salaamed to for evermore ? I hate all men ; I hate the world, the sun, the trees. I hate myself above the rest. If it were not a craven's deed I should have set myself free with a bare bodkin long ago. An envious, ungenerous world which rejoices in another's downfall, which grudges every tiny scrap of success. ' He saved others, Himself he cannot save,' sneered the Jews on Calvary. Had the man come down from the cross that moment, what a disappointment for the mob ! Was it not a joy to pierce His side and watch Him die in anguish ? I declare to you, Jasper, that it is better to be a hound than a human being, for a dog hath at least noble instincts."

Jasper stared at his sister in surprise. Was this the triumphant beauty, the richest, loveliest woman in all England ? Did that old wound rankle still, which he thought was healed over long ago. He had never seen her in so bitter a mood as she was now, moving swiftly like a tigress in a den, her shapely hands clasped tight behind her neck. The Duke's sudden death, by wakening the monitor for an instant, had stirred her more than she was herself aware of. Usually she was content to splice the thread which held the sword, and hardening her heart to callousness, blithely to trip a measure under it. But now she was looking upon her inner self, and writhed with loathing at the spectacle.

Why not, being of so energetic a mould, have turned over a new leaf then and there, you will ask perhaps. My dears, it is only very properly-balanced people who do as they ought, and turn over new leaves with alacrity. Now our Duchess was not a very properly-balanced person. On the contrary, she was inclined to let things go on anyhow, till they became so hopelessly entangled that nothing short of a miracle could put them right again. Then what struggles and what gnashings of teeth! She had certainly behaved well by the Duke, and was therefore calm for a brief space. But his death, and the shady affair with regard to the will, and the consciousness that she had only been thinking of herself when his state should have engrossed her thoughts—all these things brought back the murky waters of the past upon her, caused her to remember that she had never been his wife at all, that if she were placed in the dock and publicly burnt in the hand, such ignominy would be a just reward for her deserts.

Truly, she thought, with a soreness of heart which was physical pain, that her case was quite irremediable.

There are morasses from which we may never emerge, into which we only sink the deeper for our struggling. Frequently had she declared that there was no use in trying to reform; and yet she had been glad at her own want of success as a devil's

Amazon. But now the full truth burst on her that in that line she was perhaps not such a failure after all, that the Satanic armour was not to be doffed easily.

Others had commenced the web which bound her ; her own machinations had completed it ; she was tied hand and foot. At the door of Anagke must her sins lie, in the future as in the past. If Lady Grizel had been allied to one who could command her complete respect, she would, a woman so far, have bent her haughty nature and have been his willing slave. If she had espoused his Grace of Hamilton, for instance, who was handsome, young, and debonair, this chronicle would never have been written ; for all would probably have gone smoothly, although a sturdy nature such as my Lady Grizel's needs to be kept in check by a stronger, sturdier one than was his Grace of Hamilton's. Such a woman is safest in the hands of one whose years entitle him to the position of mentor as well as friend. When it became fitting for the maid of honour to choose a mate, her choice fell upon Hamilton rather than on the richer duke, because the latter was old enough to be her grandfather. When, her character embittered and her heart seared by circumstances, she eventually resolved to accept the old man for his wealth's sake, she reconciled herself to the sacrifice by the application of the mentor theory. But, alas ! the case was an exaggerated one. The arrow overshot its mark. The

marriage, which might have set her straight, threw the Duchess back upon herself, for his Grace treated her as a dotard's darling, permitting her to lead him as she chose, thereby reversing the situation which was desirable.

She was not long in discovering this fact, and, being forced to trust to her own strength alone, contented herself with little temporary splicings of the dangerous thread, unable truly to gauge the thinness thereof by reason of mental vision distorted by that first great warp. Like all strong-minded women, she was in some respects ridiculously weak. She moved over the waves like a stately vessel with too small a rudder. Whether she were destined to drift to the right hand or the left was apparently a mere matter of chance. It was the phantom shipwright Anagke who had fashioned the tiller, and so that blundering ghost must be held responsible for the result of the voyage.

Woman is never so beautiful as when, renouncing empire, she bows before a master ; and never is she so victorious as when thus performing homage, for by such subtle arts doth she not bind man in unseen fetters, winning his obedience in small things by flattering his self-love ? Though she knew this well enough, it was not possible for the young Duchess to bow down before the aged Duke. He knew that as well as she, and so their *ménage* had to be set upon another basis. The calm and luxury of

Tewkesbury House brought peace to its mistress. She became necessary to her ancient mate, and knew it, and was almost happy. She regretted, when she thought of them, the schemings of the past; and, regrets being disagreeable things, determined to *think* as little as might be. New dresses, new fashions, routs, hurricanes, ridottos, should engross her mind to the exclusion of the vision of that impending sword. So she was contented till the Duke died, and then, being forced to survey her soul, was by no means pleased by its complexion. Why should she look at it? why should she think now any more than before? No; she would do neither. Stopping her walk, therefore, she stood opposite to Jasper and laid her hand upon his head.

“Jasper,” she said, “I shall owe to you the fortune of the Tewkesburys. But for your promptitude the will would never have been signed, and I should have slipped down the bank again whose summit I had reached. You shall accept your part of it. Scratchpole must disappear. Lord Gowering’s son and my brother must never be hanged. You shall be provided for in the future. No need any more for picking pockets.”

The highwayman could not forbear a mournful smile, in that she who was wont to be somewhat afraid of him—who had succumbed at the critical moment, and would have been ruined but for a rather questionable proceeding on his part—should

suddenly prate to him of pocket-picking after the manner of Sir John Fielding. It was humiliating, though, to find his motives misconstrued even by her, so, taking her hands in his, he spoke at length of all his troubles ; of Bambridge and his martyrdom under that scoundrel's lash—of how all went amiss with him ; of how Fate buffeted him ; of how it was vengeance, not greed, which sent him on the road. With deep interest she listened. How strange ! From a different cause his wrongs were hers—her sentiments his—his writhing heart a picture of her own, save that his hate was of a deeper and more practical tinge than hers. His bend-sinister would account for that, of course. How dreadful, she reflected, to be a bastard ! To be blighted from birth with a blight like the king's evil. No wonder he was soured. What a disgraceful state of things that he, who was too proud to cringe in antechambers, too high to affect the Mohock tricks, and effeminate ways, and crying vices of a degraded aristocracy, should be cast out by them as a social leper, branded an innocent pariah. If she were drifting well-nigh rudderless, where then was he ? His hulk was full of holes ; no wonder if it foundered.

Pressing her cheek to his in profound pity, she murmured :

“ Oh, Jasper ! I never conceived what you must have had to bear. But we will stand by each other

now, will we not? For my sake you must bury Scratchpole—for the sake of the family honour."

"Much I have to do with honour," muttered her brother gloomily.

"For my sake then. You must watch over me as the dying Duke bade you; for, indeed, the path I tread is much beset with brambles. There will be many things to settle, whose lugubrious details will give me the horrors. I shall leave England for a time on a visit to the Electress of Saxony. She has often asked me, and now that the old man is dead, there will be no reason against my going. All my affairs shall be left in your hands. You must live here whilst I am away. Poor old Duke, how he loved me!"

Her Grace's eyes filled with tears as she recalled the days when he quavered "Happy Fair" over the wall at Bath, for which she teased him so. Then she looked up startled as a thought occurred to her. His Grace died suddenly after being attacked by collectors. Pistols were fired. If the matter were taken up might not Scratchpole be betrayed?

"Who should prosecute except you, his wife?" asked Jasper.

His sister wrung her fingers together impatiently and sighed. Truly there was to be no crawling out of the morass.

"Then I must condone the outrage. Apparently there is no way out of crime!"

She looked down into the courtyard, which was filled with whispering groups. The news of the Duke's demise had spread like wildfire. The gates were open; all came in who chose, to listen to the thrilling accounts given by the brave footmen who ran away. The horrible confusion reigned which always asserts itself in an establishment when the hand of the master is suddenly removed.

Meadows was standing there with Stone, to whom a runner was relating awful details. The Duchess frowned and set her teeth.

“The heir-at-law! what insolence!” she murmured. Hath the vulture already come to gloat over the carrion? Stare your fill, Mr. Meadows. This house shall never be yours.”

Then, with a thrill of mischievous satisfaction, she reviewed the events of the last few hours. If Meadows could only know how near he had been to fortune, and by whose instrumentality he had been defeated, would not his accustomed nonchalance be turned to energy? And if he only knew who Scratchpole was, how quickly might he be revenged! Happily poetic justice obtains not here below. If we only knew what happens behind our backs; if gossips were only cognizant of certain secrets we carefully conceal; why, what an abominably just world of retribution would our globe become! But Meadows was not certain that Scratchpole's gang had caused his uncle's death (for every outrage was

nowadays attributed by popular terror to Scratchpole); nor, of course, had been told at all that Scratchpole's hand had guided his fluttering fingers as he lay *in extremis*.

The Duchess felt duly grateful that such things should be, and quite resumed her usual careless manner.

“Yes, you must be my legal adviser, my house-steward, my majordomo as well as my dear brother,” she said. “By-the-bye, there is the old devil !”

“What old devil ?”

“Deborah, to be sure. Didn't we settle to pay her an annuity ? Do something about it whilst I am abroad.”

“Has it not been regularly paid then ?” Jasper demanded anxiously.

“I forgot all about it,” returned her Grace lightly. “It was stupid of me, and the poor old thing may be in a strait. How could I consider such a trifle ? Don't look so serious. She is too good an old devil, and too fond of enchanting me ever to be troublesome. And, indeed, she never could do much harm now. I shall start in my coach to-night for Dover, and take a smack to Rotterdam. See to her.”

“I will go to Hampstead this very afternoon,” replied her brother, whose brow darkened with foreboding.



CHAPTER II.

STONE MAKES AN EFFORT.

DADAM DEBORAH, relict of Parson Ames, occupied a charming cottage on the top of Hampstead Hill, which had been built and ornamented with exquisite *haut-gout* by a liveryman (now dead) of Farringdon Ward Without. A better place for concealing a parson's widow could not have been selected by Jasper, for it seemed by lying open to the road to disdain privacy, and bore so many signs of appertaining to a wealthy shopkeeper, that any one in search of an old lady would have passed it by without the least inquiry. Moreover, the house stood too far back in its garden for any one to peer in at the windows, while the plaster effigies of Scaramouch and Harlequin, Pierrot and Columbine, painted exactly like nature, that grinned over the hedge, seemed to ask every passer-by to stand still

and admire them. Close to this hedge stood a square gazebo or tea-house of painted laths, adorned by battlements and spires of wood, each spire fancifully garnished with the bowl of a tobacco-pipe—evidently the lounging-place on Sundays of some alderman of taste. Within this temple might be seen hanging an elevation of the Mansion House and a vast canvas like a signboard, representing a bolt-upright gentleman in a full-bottom and a padusoy coat, with one hand elegantly resting by the finger-tips on the ends of a laced cravat pulled through a buttonhole, whilst the other held out for the instruction of spectators a letter inscribed “Liveryman of London.” Of course this was the portrait (at least so people thought who gazed with awe upon it from the road) of the possessor of the property; of the cit who loved to look on his limned likeness as he smoked his pipe and displayed his new wig to dusty Sabbath revellers. If the truth must be told, however, this entertaining work of art had been ejected from the parlour by Deborah, who looked on anything suggestive of trade as an insult to the fastidious eye of a clerical madam, and who would in like manner have turned out the fellow-portrait of obese Mrs. Livery-woman, as a shepherdess smelling to a nose-gay, and have routed Scaramouch and Harlequin, Pierrot and Columbine as too frivolous for the widow of a churchman, had she not peremptorily been forbidden so to do. There was a special reason,

though she knew it not, for the keeping up of an appearance of citizen good taste ; so she was fain to confine her labours of improvement to the back garden and orchard, whence she could obtain a fine view of St. Paul's cupola enveloped in smoke, and the inevitable spectacle of two men in chains hanging on Kennington Common.

Jasper's wound, thanks to Susannah and the Elders, was, as he surmised, a mere scratch. His handsome mulberry velvet was disfigured by a bullet-hole, but that was of small consequence. He determined, therefore, to ride to Hampstead forthwith and see after Deborah, then gallop across to Sot's Hole and make known his resolution to the gang. At his sister's instance he had quite resolved to abandon the profession of the road, although it would not be without a pang that he would withhold his hand from the throat of society. Once before he had declared a truce which society was the first to break. No matter ! For his sister's sake it was necessary that he should throw aside the crape —for that sister's sake, to whom he swore to devote his life, for whom he had foregone a desire to settle in the new land of promise, where malefactors swing not, where hope is not yet crushed to death. Yes, the road must be given up. But before resigning its wild excitements and stirring joys, he would lead forth the gang once more to victory. So he stuffed his tools into his pockets, intending

later in the day to change his clothes at Sot's Hole.

“What should he do about Sim Ames?” he wondered as he jogged along. It was a piece of insolence in his lieutenant to have braved his distinct orders last night by prowling on the Mary le Bone cross-ways. Sim Ames, moved possibly by jealousy, was less friendly than he used to be with his old comrade. It was wrong of him to have acted as he did. It was wrong of Ted Barker and Nimming Ned, and all the other rascals, to have shown disobedience. What signified it though, after all? He was about to part company with them, and they would be sorry: for they cared ten times more (as he knew) for him than they did for Sim Ames. He knew that a finger-beck would have brought them all over to his side if a quarrel had ever taken place between himself and his lieutenant.

Then his reflections turned to Deborah. It would be well to increase her allowance, or at least to see that it was regularly paid. She probably would be much hurt at her mistress's behaviour. The cottage was charming, she averred, when first installed in it; the very place to dream away declining years, were it not for the monstrosities in the front garden which would prevent her ever sitting there.

But the neighbourhood was certainly lonely. There was a midwife or two whom she might enter-

tain at times, with whom she could discuss the interesting events of Hampstead, or whom she could awe with tales of high life at court. But in order to entertain as befits a parson's madam who has been tire-woman to a duchess, bohea and slim cakes and other grand delights are a *sine quâ non*—and we all know that such may only be acquired with money. It certainly was foolish of her Grace to trifle with a woman who if personally harmless might by outcry awake dogs which are best left sleeping, and put inimical noses on the scent. There was no doubt about it, that it was most important for Jasper to see Deborah and make things ship-shape before her Grace left England. What if, hearing of the Duke's sudden demise, she might tremble for her pension, and calling at Tewkesbury House find its shutters closed, its inmate flown! She would be sure to raise a cackling and draw attention to herself—the very thing which it was advisable she should not do. Jasper tightened his reins and spurred his horse up Hampstead Hill.

Other horses' hoofs clattered behind which were no echo of his own. He had heard them clink several times, but took no heed, so engrossed was he in the matter of Deborah and Sim and the renouncing of his vengeance. No doubt, he reflected, it is quite right to turn the other cheek when smitten, but the accomplishment of the severe act requires more fortitude in some people than the

leading of a forlorn hope. Two horsemen were trotting leisurely behind whom he made no effort to identify. Shaking back his hair, which had become unribboned, from his face, he for convenience sake or force of habit tucked it into his hat and broke into a canter. Scaramouch and Harlequin were in sight. With the naked eye they could be detected leering over the quickset, and there was much to be done before nightfall.

The two horsemen were so engaged in earnest converse as to notice Jasper as little as he did them. Mr. Andrew Stone was expounding his theories as to the Duke's death to Mr. Meadows, as the pair proceeded for an airing on Hampstead Heath.

“He died in consequence of a nervous shock,” Stone said; “and there was something queer about that will, I dare swear. Our *Æsculapian* friend hinted as much to us, and the servants distinctly declare that it was signed at the last minute. You will find that you have been cozened out of your rights by the Duchess and her brother (devil's spawn both), who were left alone with the dying man. They absolutely shortened his span of life by squeezing from him a signature. The valet told us that, if you remember. Of what use is untold wealth if one's last moments are to be so worried?”

“I can't help it,” answered Meadows quietly. “I never expected that his Grace would leave me anything, and it matters little to me whether he

made it away ten years ago or five minutes before he died. Drop the subject, I pray you. The Duchess, the few times I ever spoke to her, was vastly civil ; and as for the brother you rave about, I do not know him at all. You forget that his Grace never admitted his humble nephew into Tewkesbury House.”

Stone glanced sideways at his friend and sighed fretfully. This heir-at-law was singularly apathetic, and yet the ex-tutor had quite determined to make a catspaw of him. How provoking to deal with are apathetic people ! The plans concerning which he and Wilkes debated in the coffee-house a short time back—plans which Wilkes derided as visionary—were nearly complete now, rendered so by his Grace’s unexpected death ; and yet the links refused quite to join. Then the stumbling-block in the way of their welding was the old Duke’s life. That stumbling-block was removed. Better still ; rumours more marked than hints pointed to something underhand. Stone, seizing the situation at a glance, saw his way to the raising of money from the sons of Israel on the possibility of the will being set aside. Gambling was the pet vice of the period ; here was a new opportunity of indulging it which unscrupulous capitalists would be delighted to embrace. Did not noble members of a first-class club t’other day (men with stars and ribbons who had no pleasant dealings with Israel) absolutely allow a

man to die on the pavement before their door—without succouring him—merely because wagers had been taken as to his last breath? If peers could be guilty of such insensate gambling, why not Israel, with as little basis for its restless greed? But of course nothing could be done if Meadows would not rouse himself. He must be roused somehow, for it really was too tantalising. Once established in possession of the ducal acres, he might be looked on as a walking money-bag for Wilkes and himself to plunge their hands into at will; and both were sorely in want of money. Not but what Andrew Stone's thirst for revenge always stood foremost in his mind above greed of gold. Somehow or other his enemy was to be ruined. If he could not unduchess her, why then he must change his tactics and see what could be done about the will. But she was strongly supported, was the Duchess, by the presence of her brother—the grave stern man whose quiet manner of effacing himself seemed suspicious to a groping mole, like Stone. Of course the Duchess and her brother had done something which they should not with regard to the will—Stone judged them by the standard of his own probable conduct in such a matter. Oh! if he could only get that brother under his thumb somehow! or Deborah, who was certainly hidden away by this brother and this sister. But of what use was wishing? Deborah was not to be found; those

marriage proofs were gone for ever. The only chance was to try and set aside the will. What a hazy chance! Sure Mr. Stone was beside himself!

Wilkes was never tired of laughing at Stone's dreams.

“Unpractical man!” he was wont to say, “whilst you are cogitating over new machinery I shall have built up my edifice. My bricks are sharp and bright, and shall be cemented with my own elbow-grease. Depend upon it, mere plodding industry will do more than all your dreaming.”

And events seemed to prove that he was right, for whilst the ex-tutor was crying out, “Would that I held these people!” Colonel Wilkes's newspaper was doing its work.

Funds, though, were much needed. As a firebrand, the *North Briton* was a marvellous success. Hundreds awaited the appearance of each new number with impatience, for popular exasperation against Bute and his creature Grenville and his dupe the Princess Dowager was certain to find therein fresh pabulum whereon to batten, fresh epigrams to be hurled at the royal carriages whenever they dared to show their panels. All Wilkes's ingenious wit, all Churchill's withering invective, were crystallised on its pages. People read and shrined the verbal jewels in their hearts. Enthusiasm for Wilkes, the people's champion, day by day increased as a snowball increases with the

rolling. Wilkes squinted out of tavern windows with his hand upon his breast, bowed out of boxes at the theatre, showing his blackened teeth with a leer which the mob took for patriotic satisfaction, not mischievous contempt. His portraits were bought up now in thousands, while the Great Commoner's only went off by hundreds. "Wilkes was the man," shouted the scum with conviction. Wilkes was the champion for whose advent they so long had panted. Mr. Pitt was very great, no doubt—a brilliant icicle—a hero worthy to be sung by Homer—a colder nobler hero than Homer's were—a mortal more richly endowed with divine attributes than the drunken dwellers on Olympus. But too close contact with perfection is disagreeable. The archangel Gabriel would not shine as a boon companion over a cup of tea. Wilkes was a pleasanter patriot than Pitt, for he laughed and joked. Men might slap him familiarly on the back. Who would ever dream of taking such a liberty with awful Pitt? That banished eagle was flapping his ruffled wings away upon his distant rock alone in mid-ocean. Out of sight out of mind. Three cheers for Wilkes and Liberty. The idle prophecy of the lively Colonel at Bath was become sober truth. "If I were to fight you with your own weapons I should beat you out of the field; for the buckram of your austerity ties your legs together." This, or something to this effect, had Wilkes

jokingly said to Mr. Pitt at Bath, and the result was showing that he was right.

Mobs are proverbially short-sighted. For the moment those who had wept over his horses and kissed his footmen, vowing that none but the Great Commoner could save England, were looking on that hero with indifference. He was away, racked by infirmity and sickness. The country was drifting quietly in his absence among the breakers, and no one seemed to perceive the fact or care about it. Wilkes bade the populace to turn their eyes away from foreign lands, glorified no more by British victories, and contemplate and put right their own private wrongs and troubles. Wrongs and troubles there were galore. So long as there appeared no urgent need of him, people were content to do without Pitt; the cold, the ascetic, the dreadfully and unpleasantly pure. Wilkes was the man for these calmer days (the peace, though unpopular enough, at least brought temporary calm to Europe); Wilkes, the sweeper away of home abuses, the public impeacher of corrupt leaders—he was the man! So far well enough for the demagogue. But Wilkes needed something more than empty shouting. His tactics were stirring up for him a host of enemies—of foes high in office, of the noblest rank. Nothing is more cowardly than an undisciplined mob. As things stood it was probable that he would be deserted when the fight

came—that struggle which sooner or later was inevitable. Instead of making his fortune he would rot in a prison, a prospect by no means pleasing to the jovial Colonel. Therefore, in the event of a tussle, it would be a matter of extreme importance to have a paid and disciplined band of men who should act as decoys and leaders to the riff-raff, in order that the court might be forced to perceive that this new patriot was no Bugaboo, but a really formidable adversary who would have to be bought at his own price. As Wilkes's power grew, so did his pretensions. Mr. Pitt or my Lord Bute might have purchased him for a song a few years back. Now the *North Briton* was come into being; a comfortable berth and four or five thousand a year was the very least which he could take.

This was all very well as an aerial palace. The ire of the nation was being cleverly lashed, but where were the decoys who should keep King Mob up to the mark? It was the old question of money all over again. Wilkes's debts were enormous, his assets nil. The only suggestions which Stone was prepared to make turned upon this hazy upsetting of the Duchess. The two allies discussed the matter constantly without ever arriving at a practical result.

On the night of the Duke's death the pair were as usual debating this knotty point when their *Aesculapian* friend entered with his news. Wilkes,

who was dressing for a drunken bout with the Mednamite friars, contented himself with adjusting a patch upon his cheekbone, another on his chin. He failed to see how his Grace's demise could aid him. Stone's busy brain was immediately set working. The Duke dead, his will signed when *in extremis*. Something really could be made of this, combined with the evidence of Deborah and Lady Gladys. Surely it would be well to go instantly to Tewkesbury House. But Wilkes declined to join in any such folly. Money could, he thought, be won through no Quixotism. Lady Gladys, as all the world knew, was about to be united to Lord Bellasis, which would close her mouth; who might force her to come forward? Deborah had vanished. What could be gained by pushing themselves into a house of mourning where they were not wanted? Wilkes, therefore, stepped into his chair with the monk's habit under his arm, which was used by the Mednamites as a jolly uniform, and was borne away, while Stone bit his nails and pondered. Presently, his resolution taken, Stone marched off to the modest lodging inhabited by Meadows in the neighbourhood of Golden Square. Poor Mr. Meadows was bored and yawned. He was so tired of hearing of the Duke's hatred of him.

“Dead, is he?” he said with indifference. “Peace be to his wicked old soul then. What nonsense!

Why should her Grace be concocting plots against him at midnight when she had had weeks and weeks of daylight wherein comfortably to compass them ? Mr. Stone was really too much of a melodramatist,” he droned, “ and should turn his attention to tragedies for the little theatre in the Haymarket. Indeed he became an intolerable bore !”

Would Meadows come to Tewkesbury House and reconnoitre ? asked the friend who was so amazingly interested in his affairs.

“ Well, well. A wilful man will have his way,” yawned the heir-at-law. He got his hat and clouded cane, and the two sallied across the fields as the day was breaking, and conversed affably with the brave footmen in the court-yard, to be spied through the window by her indignant Grace.

The news they gathered surprised Meadows and set him thinking. A singular affair altogether no doubt, but no affair of his. Stone ground his teeth, and could have struck him for his free and easy ways ; yet was determined to persevere and stick close beside his prey. Together the two breakfasted, together they strolled into chocolate-houses, where everybody was talking of the Duke. How well off would the Duchess be left ? Would she have all or nothing ? Some selfish old men have a way of drinking up young lives as vampires suck blood, and then departing across Styx, leaving no equivalent behind. At the entrance of Meadows, voices sank

into a whisper. People glanced over their shoulders. The heir-at-law was disgusted.

“I protest,” he cried, “that I shall hide myself till this nine days’ wonder is forgotten. I challenge you to a country ride, Mr. Stone. Hampstead, Twickenham, anywhere—until it shall be time to sup and move to cards.”

The pair rode out accordingly, and breasted Hampstead Hill a few paces behind Jasper, who turned round to see what manner of men were following, before venturing up the by-road which led to Deborah’s bower; and the man whose business it was to conceal her whereabouts, found himself in close proximity to the other man whose special business it was to find her out—under the very windows of the lady in question. How strangely doth fate order things!

As Jasper turned and showed his face Meadows gave an involuntary start.

“As I live it is he!” he muttered; “the fellow I met at Fulham all those years ago. I never forget a face, and have reason thankfully to remember his.”

“His? whose?” asked Stone idly.

“You see that horseman yonder with his hair tucked up?” whispered Meadows in his ear, glad to change the subject of conversation from the everlasting topic of the Duke. “That man once did me a service which is unusual in a highwayman.”

“A highwayman?”

“Yes. He is or was a highwayman, as many of his betters, I dare say, have been, and once did me a service, which, though it may seem a trivial thing to you, is one I have never been able to repay. It is a funny story ; much funnier than your melodramatic dronings. I will tell it to you. Nay ; I must have my revenge—and will ! I was riding along one night to a party at Fulham, when (which served me right for being alone and unarmed) I was stopped by two collectors. Of course I gave up at once such little coin as I had about me, and was about to proceed, when one of them insisted upon my resigning the ring upon my finger as well. Now that ring contained my dead mother’s hair, and was the only relic I possessed of her, so I became dogged and swore that they should rather take my life. I might have lost my life and my ring to boot, if the other robber had not coerced his mate and forced him to let me pass. That man is the other robber. His face is graven on my memory, for his vizard fell off, and I particularly marked that queer method of tucking up his hair. Very queer—isn’t it ?”

Queer it certainly was. Stone stared at one, then at the other, and could not believe his senses. He had so ardently wished to get this brother in his power, whose stalwart bulk stood between the Duchess and himself. Was his companion jesting ? No ; evidently not. He held the stalwart one by the merest chance ; Fate was smiling upon his

efforts at last. It behoved him to make the most of this stroke of Fortune; for, the brother in his power, might he not be able to wield him as an engine against her Grace?

Of course it was so. Blind that he had been not to have solved the mystery of this secretive man before. His uncertain position, his frequent disappearances from Tewkesbury House—of course he was a highwayman. Were there not many bastards, pauper hangers-on to the skirts of great families, who gained a precarious livelihood by such dishonest means? He knew already of what the sister could be capable. The brother a collector! Rightly, then, he had appraised them both as “devil’s spawn.”

“That person riding in front of us robbed you once at Fulham, you say? Could you swear it?”

“Certainly I could if needful,” returned Meadows in surprise.

“Do you know who he is?” Stone asked anxiously.

“Not I.”

“Then I will introduce you. A fine day for riding, Master Jasper.”

At first sight of Mr. Stone, Jasper, raising his hat, had shaken down his hair and pushed it behind his ears. This excursion of the ex-tutor’s was most awkward, for exactly opposite to them grinned Columbine, and Scaramouch, and Pierrot, and Har-

lequin. What if untoward destiny should impel the owner of those statues to run out into her front garden at this particular moment ? Perhaps he was on the trail of Deborah. If he excused himself he might give a clue. So the party jogged amicably along past Scaramouch and the tea-gazebo, where the engaging canvas of the liveryman was, towards the village beyond, where, sitting on alehouse-benches under a spreading chestnut, a party of villagers were swilling beer.

Meadows and Jasper were introduced, and bowed. The latter had no remembrance of the former's face, but eyed him with curiosity when he heard his name. They trotted along, the three ; Meadows on one side, Jasper in the middle, gossiping of light topics, till Stone, watching his opportunity, made a sudden attack from behind upon his unsuspecting companion, just as they were passing the alehouse door.

“ Where got you that bullet through your coat ? ” he had been asking.

“ In a duel,” Jasper had replied curtly.

“ A collector's duel, I warrant, on Barnet Common,” retorted Stone, pulling down with a rapid movement the cuffs of Jasper's sleeves, and by pinioning him behind with them, preventing all access to his pockets.

“ Let me go ! ” muttered Jasper as soon as he recovered from his surprise.

"I have you now," returned Stone with an ugly show of his fangs. "Mr. Meadows, I adjure you, help me! Good people, help! In the King's name I arrest this man, who is a highwayman."

In a trice Jasper was dragged from his horse and tied with a rope which lay handy. The villagers, who would have fled shrieking had they met him alone on the highway, vied with each other in boldly rifling his pockets. A powder-horn. Two pairs of pistols. Bullets. A book of cross-roads. In his hat a crape. Ominous signs!

"You see I was right!" Stone cried in jubilation.

"You were, good sir!" echoed the villagers.
"To the compter! to the compter!"

Meadows, being of a more lymphatic turn, took longer to recover from the suddenness of Stone's attack than did Jasper. He stared open-mouthed. Then rousing himself began to stammer forth:

"No, no! good people. Hear me. It was in consequence of an unlucky speech of mine that this man was seized. He did me a great service once. Come what may, I will never prosecute. Unbind him, friends, and let him go."

With a huzza the unstable yokels were about to obey. Stone saw his victim slipping from his clutches.

"You idiot!" he whispered to Mr. Meadows.

“This man is the bastard brother of her Grace of Tewkesbury. The same who assisted at the signing. We hold the varlet, and will force him to confess something. Friends! patience, I beg. We will take this person within the alehouse and there question him. Make way!”

Ready as the fustian-clad always were to bow before a coat of superior material, the villagers made way at once; and Jasper was hustled within the alehouse pinioned fast with ropes. The many-headed tried to follow, but Stone without ado slammed the door of the bar-parlour in their faces, locked and leaned his back against it, and crossing his arms showed his fangs to his prisoner in a malignant grin.

Vainly Jasper strove to burst his bonds. His hair fell in elf-locks over his flushed face, the veins in his neck swelled like knots. He gnashed his teeth in impotent rage. To be snared thus, stabbed, as it were, from behind by a disloyal adversary—at such a time, too, when so much might come to hang upon his freedom! With the speed of thought nightmare possibilities flashed before his eyes. His sister starting for the Continent to-night; nothing settled as to Deborah. Happily the will was safely lodged in the lawyer’s hands. If only Deborah’s matter had been trusted to him too! But that affair was one requiring diplomacy, involving secrets which might be trusted with no gentleman of the

robe. If by ill-luck he were to be shut up, he must endeavour to send a message to his sister—away in Saxony, so far! Meanwhile Sim and Ned and the rest would have to get up an *alibi*, were a direct charge brought against him. What charge? Meadows loudly vowed he would not prosecute. Stone evidently had a reason for thus suddenly declaring war against him. They had ofttimes met at Tewkesbury House and elsewhere. Till now Stone was always studiously courteous to her Grace's brother. He was the intimate ally, too, of Wilkes, whom Jasper revered as one who loved the fustian-clad. There was more in this than he could fathom at present. What if (since he was suddenly coming out as an open enemy) it should occur to him to advertise, to insert into the daily paper a description of him with his hair tucked up? Then it might come out that he was Scratchpole, and not all his sister's influence—not all the King's horses or all the King's men—could save the terror of the town from Tyburn tree. The thought disturbed him; not for his own sake; he valued life but little. For his sister's sake he trembled. To leave her thus so unprotected, in such a strait, and she so reckless! Bitterly he cursed himself for his folly in listening to Sim's beguiling when he returned from Canada. How often do we try to console ourselves for a mistake by hurling anathemas upon the past! This was no time for curses. Haughtily he returned

Stone's smile, bidding him beware of arresting a gentleman on a frivolous charge.

"Not frivolous!" laughed Stone with another ugly glitter of his teeth. "You must thank Mr. Meadows here for opening my eyes. Ass that I was not to have guessed that your morose spirit would take delight in such a calling. A collector on the highway! Ha! ha! How her Grace your sister will weep when she sees you on the cart! The more so maybe if she stands by your side, which is not impossible!" he added dryly, while Jasper eyed him with bated breath. "For swing you will for a certainty, my lad—take my word for it—unless you impart to us a little secret. A dozen words, and I will cut that rope. Come! Take counsel from it, for it is of the same growth as those used upon the gallows!"

"Secret! I have none!" Jasper murmured uneasily.

"Just a little secret as to how you passed last night."

Jasper breathed again. He was on the wrong scent. All that passed last night was strictly within the limits of the law. As to the other matter—well—it was fortunate he did not press him about Deborah.

To be locked up though—*now*—on a charge dating ever so many years ago, at a moment when it was especially needful to be free! The prospect

was agonising. For the sake of the wild beauty, his sister, Jasper demeaned himself so far as to implore Meadows to intercede in his behalf.

“By all the dice that will be rattled this night,” returned Meadows warmly, who for once was quite alert, “I swear to you that you have naught to fear from me. I am an odd fellow with little ambition beyond modest comfort. I care not a Queen Anne’s farthing whether your sister cozened me out of the estates or not. You did me a quaint service which I appreciate more than a more substantial one. The ring you saved for me is here. See. It hangs now by a ribbon always around my neck. The precious hair rubs my skin of the only woman who ever was worth my loving—my mother. God rest her soul. I promised you that I would repay your service, and careless, slothful creature though I may seem, yet am I a gentleman of strict integrity. This friend of ours here takes my interests to heart much more than I do myself. Why, I know not,” he continued suspiciously. “But as I am a gentleman—a pauper heir-at-law to millions—I swear to move no whit in this business.”

“You shall not cut your own throat,” cried Stone with a glitter of enmity in his eye. “In the murkiness of night this adventurer and his sister cobbled up a testament to cheat you out of your rights. Blind fool that you are to fight against one who would be your benefactor!”

Virtuous Mr. Stone forgot that just before he was offering to compound a felony.

“Mr. Meadows,” he continued, “I am astonished at you. This fellow hath fallen into our hands, and he shall relate to us the proceedings of last night. He shall relate unto us much of his experience—an experience which I have no doubt is thrilling—or else we will turn on him a screw which I wist not of until his sister taught it to me. She shut me in the Fleet (curse her !) to suit her plans ; otherwise I should never have made the acquaintance of Mr. Bambridge—a prince of jailers—who hath reduced the art of torture to a science. Quite a genius among torturers he is,” went on Stone, who was forgetting to be virtuous. “A study of his arts beguiled the leisure hours which this man’s sister forced me to pass within his jurisdiction. State prisoners are usually too grand to frequent the lower side ; yet I frequented it from curiosity. I saw the starving wretches daily, whose condition is an insult to the law. I saw them with the skull-cap on, the shears, the thumb-screw. What cared I ? I saw them endure—hapless victims—till the stoutest succumbed under protracted agony. Bambridge is an artist in his way—the very man to break such stubborn knaves as this.”

At the vision conjured by the ex-tutor’s idle words (for he knew not that Jasper had ever been under the yoke of Bambridge) the brother of the

Duchess gave way to despair. Could it be possible that a God with claims to clemency would permit of his passing again through that dreadful valley of the shadow of death? That valley, whose terrors were worse than death itself, in that the anguish of its passage was long-drawn. Could it be possible that the victim was again to return into the custody of his persecutor—to fall back again into that ruffian's claws who had already wrung his life awry, and had gibingly confessed to having brought his mother to her death because she shrank in horror from his hideous caresses? No wonder if the olive cheek turned pale—if the stern lip quivered.

Stone, quite unconscious of how good a card he was playing, was enchanted with the effect of his eloquence.

“This ruffler,” he thought, “is but a coward after all! I will give him to Bambridge’s keeping, and wring from him what I choose—the cur.”

As to Meadows, he stared at Stone as on a rattle-snake; and the latter felt with compunction that perchance he had been wrong to drop his mask prematurely before the man who was to be a cat-saw. Yet no. It is often prudent to establish a raw, by rubbing which we may worry the bearer of the raw into submission. Meadows was horribly lymphatic. Persuasion did not seem to answer. Perhaps terror might. At least it was worth while trying at second-hand.

Fortune was turning her wheel, and Mr. Stone felt jocund. To empty out the store of hate which time had garnered in his bosom against the Duchess through her brother, was indeed an unexpected chance of sweet revenge. Jasper should be invited to confess all sorts of things; should be made to tell where Deborah lay in ambush; should finally be forced to tell whatsoever his inquisitors might choose to wring from him—and all through Bambridge, the prince of jailers. A fig for the parson's widow now. That cord was frail. A stout string was attached to the bow of her Grace's enemy within the last hour which should twang and twang in her inmost heart till on bended knees the proud beauty sued for mercy. And then—and then!—*he would refuse it!*

Quickly the smiling ex-tutor passed through the alehouse door, and exhorted the villagers to conduct at once a most notorious and devilish collector, who was known now to have perpetrated many a murderous fact, before the nearest justice of the peace.

“He shall be conducted thither openly by you, good friends,” said this smooth-spoken gentleman. “I will lay such things as I have to relate before the justice, and beg that he may be committed to the Fleet. A notorious ruffian, friends, is this one, who would cut a way out of the compter as a rat gnaws through cheese. Quick, friends! The sun

sinks. For your own sakes be quick, or there may be a rescue."

The simple folk hustled Jasper along, bestowing on him many a dig in the back in retaliation for broad pieces mulcted from them by brethren of his order. Saying nothing, he strode firmly along, heeding not their buffets. Would Meadows be true to his word? Had he the courage? He looked lazy—but lazy people sometimes rouse themselves. When Stone went without to harangue the people, Meadows plucked the highwayman by his sleeve and whispered in his ear, "Never fear. I will see to this!"

Would he? If not, what might not happen to her Grace?



CHAPTER III.

IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY.

WHEN Phaeton strove to direct the chariot of the sun he came to dire mishap, because it is a law of nature that each unit shall do his special work and no other. When Icarus attempted to vie with the birds of the air he tumbled down to earth and hurt himself. When Lord Bute assumed the deportment of a blown-out frog he rendered himself ridiculous. When George Grenville, the political bat, took in hand the reins of government, he was not only absurd himself but managed to hold up his royal master to obloquy as well—that hapless master whom all save Mr. Pitt seemed bent on placing in a false light. My Lord Bute directed his doll *sub rosa* and also retained the private favour of his Majesty, whereby the favourite, though apparently disgraced, remained to all intents and purposes

prime minister of England. But a moment came when there was trouble in the menagerie ; when the bat became impatient of the frog's restraint.

George Grenville, coming to the conclusion that he could not make greater havoc of affairs than his predecessor had done, resolved to throw off that predecessor's yoke and bully the King alone. The people were beginning to cry out that the hated Scotchman had retired only in name, that Grenville was his tool, the King his slave. Eggs and cats were prepared for him by cart-loads. Grenville had no idea of receiving in his face the cats and eggs that were intended for another ; so he kicked away the ladder by which he had mounted, and told my Lord Bute roundly to attend to his own business. He became a hectoring bat, a blustering cheiropeter, flapping his pinions audaciously in the face of royalty, invading the King's closet at unseasonable hours, coercing Majesty itself. Lord Bute had been pompous, empty, theatrically tragic ; Grenville was unstable, tyrannical, short-sighted, bullying. He played with edged tools ; assumed a personage his limbs could not carry ; jumped into a wheel he could not turn. The summer brought about by Mr. Pitt was fast browning. A winter brought about by Lord Bute and his successor was coming on the land with howling blast, and snow, and sleet. How would they withstand the storm ?

The King was at no pains to conceal his distrust

of Grenville, although he was just such a mediocrity as should have found favour in his eyes. His tiresome sermons in the closet, the mixture there was in him of rashness and slovenly incapacity, disgusted his master, who was abetted therein by the favourite so soon as that individual discovered that his puppet danced no longer to his piping.

It was a miserable time for the luckless young monarch who was now quite the shut-up Grand Llama, and went no more abroad. Why should he drive forth to be insulted by his people? To be hissed and hooted by an ignorant ungrateful rabble for whom he had made the arch-sacrifice? No. He wandered in his gardens at Buckingham House or moved under cover of darkness like a thief in the night to Kew, there to prune his roses and cultivate his plants in literal obedience to the maxim of Voltaire's *Candide*, “*Tout cela est fort bien, mais il faut cultiver son jardin.*” Absorbed in floriculture he tried to forget that pale Lady Sarah was fading away before his eyes, that people were openly calling his mother very ugly names, that the mob was lashing like an ocean buffeted by wind; that Colonel Wilkes, as a visible representative of the wind, had already done much and might do more. He tried not to perceive that his nobles grew daily more and more depraved, that his people looked on their new young monarch as even a greater failure than the last had been. To Wilkes, the abominable Wilkes,

he traced all his more recent troubles; and plainly informed Grenville one day that if he were worth his salt he would put down Wilkes with a high hand.

Then did Grenville commence one of his daily sermons, improving the occasion for the behoof of his royal master until that unlucky person chafed in spirit. So he was bullied by his minister, cursed by his people, miserable in his private relations—poor young King !

The Tories were weak and incompetent; there was no doubt about it. Their policy abroad was apparently guided by the weather-cock. Their policy at home was shillyshally to a degree. They were making England contemptible in the eyes of Europe. Nay—had already done so. The King was uneasily conscious of approaching tempests from beyond seas, of a cloud on the horizon no bigger than a man's hand. Who could avert its spreading save Mr. Pitt ? It was all very fine for the fustian-clad to cry out after Colonel Wilkes. Statesmen knew well that he was a plausible demagogue, who moulded the mob into an engine for the attainment of his private ends; but that, those ends once attained, he would probably laugh in the face of his dupes. He was a patriot who prated of liberty, who spoke well, whose speeches teemed with wit; but he was no man to steer the ship of State. A patriot ! ah me ! my brethren. How few of those who

assume the name are really swayed by love of country ! Self is the root of all—yet, tut ! I am a veteran now and given to garrulity. The King was furious that the folly of his ministers should have permitted this bogey to swell to such proportions.

Wilkes had offered himself both to ministry and opposition at the price of a snug berth. Pitt had always haughtily set himself against bribery of any kind. The Tories derided the demagogue's power. "Very well," he had then said, "chacun pour soi." And now he was grown into a formidable nuisance, who planted daily thorns in the royal flesh, and held the whole cabinet up to derision. It would never do for the King to cry mercy now. The opportunity was past. Though angry with his mother for her conduct in the Sarah business, he could not be expected to forgive Wilkes for the names he taught the mob to call her. The dragon's teeth were sown. Who should cope with the dreadful vengeful army suddenly brought to life ? Mr. Pitt—seemingly none but he. Yet the King, although in his soul he knew it, could not humble himself so far as to call in the aid of the Great Commoner—of the cold-blooded surgeon who had so calmly cut his young heart to mincemeat ; who was responsible for the blanched roses of poor Sarah, whose aspect set him hourly upon the rack. No, no ! Anything rather than cruel Mr. Pitt. No man hath a right so heartlessly to sacrifice another. Brutus, and Cato, and

the rest command our admiration and respect as we contemplate them through the dim glass of time, but they must have been most unpleasant comrades. And yet—and yet ! The license of this Wilkes was dreadful. Numbers of the *North Briton*, copies, too, of scurrilous pamphlets printed at Wilkes's private press, were constantly finding their way somehow to the royal hand. They fluttered over the garden wall ; they dropped with pebbles tied to them through open windows. The Grand Llama might shut his ears to the hisses of the populace, but he might not close his eyes to the gay Colonel's rhetoric.

Grenville, short-sighted and blustering as he was, could not but perceive what was passing in the King's mind. Unless he was to be ignominiously turned out of office, he must do something positive towards the scotching of the reptile. What ? Secretly doubtful of himself, he called his late patron into council, my Lord Bute, who considered himself the leader of the Tories. That lord was as bitter against Wilkes as the King could be, for not only was he stigmatised by him as the Princess Dowager's paramour, but it was thanks to the mob-champion that he was condemned to the humiliation of a disguise—of creeping about the city like a criminal arrayed in a red wig and conspirator's cloak. Wilkes's gibes rankled like poisoned barbs. Eagerly he condoned Grenville's self-emancipation

from his thrall, and joined with him again against the common enemy.

The *North Briton* poured forth its sheets from the press, and culminated, as far as ministers were concerned, in its forty-fifth number, which was bought up by the rabble in hundreds, and which fairly set fire to the mine. Wilkes had been gradually leading up to this. The mine was laid, the match was a long one, its flame touched the powder at last, and awful was the explosion. The King groaned in spirit; Bute winced; Grenville fairly bellowed.

“It is an infamous, seditious libel,” he shrieked, “tending to alienate the affections of the people from the King and excite them to traitorous insurrection against his government.”

There was no bearing such behaviour any longer. The demagogue must be run down by any means.

Just as Stone was bent upon running down the Duchess by any unscrupulous means whatever, so were Bute and Grenville bent upon crushing Colonel Wilkes. But the difficulty lay in the means to be employed. They put their heads together, and the favourite at last suggested that it might be well to take into their counsels his own trusty henchman, the captain of his bruisers, who had dropped a mysterious hint recently that he knew more of the Colonel’s doings than he chose to tell.

“Let us see him together,” Lord Bute said. “We will cross-question him, and possibly may

glean something of importance ; it is worth the trial, for he is a singular person, is my equerry Mr. Ames ; as singular a person as his dear friend, her Grace of Tewkesbury's bastard brother."

The wording of the forty-fifth number of the *North Briton*, which was causing all the hubbub, was so careful that nothing could be made of it, although it bristled with poisoned shafts. Through it alone it would not be possible to crush Colonel Wilkes. If the favourite's henchman knew something of the demagogue's private affairs, perhaps he might find means of obtaining access to his papers. Yes ; that was it. He ought certainly to be consulted without delay. So it was settled that my lord should bring his domestic on a certain morning to Westminster Abbey, in whose aisles on wet days beaux and beauties walked. There he might meet the minister as if by accident, and it would be less particular than a set appointment at home. In dealing with the demagogue it behoved them to be circumspect. They would meet casually, and find out together whether Mr. Ames's hint was likely to be useful to them or not.

The morning came, and Grenville flapped up and down the aisles, bowing to right and left. It gave him pleasure thus publicly to sniff the incense which is due to a prime minister, and so he appeared within the ancient building fully half an hour before the concerted time, despite the rheumatic damps

which are inseparable from a London November. Lords and ladies cackled round him, for rumours were abroad that he really meant to do something ; not only with regard to obnoxious Colonel Wilkes, but also in other affairs of moment. Lord Bute had left things in such a mess, that prompt action was much needed from his successor. He and Lord Holland had dipped freely into the treasury, but had not thought it necessary to cope with the expenses of the war. Those expenses were piling up at compound interest. Was it true that Mr. Grenville intended to grapple with the budget and had plans for replenishing the exchequer ?

Quite an exciting topic this for lords and ladies who thought it modish to dabble in politics, and who were always wanting money themselves. "What was his mighty plan ? Surely he would tell his dearest Ashe," that painted houri demanded archly. "Do tell us ? We know you are so clever !" echoed a dozen voices. Grenville was delighted. He was going to tax the American colonies, he announced. That was his plan, and a vastly good one too, he considered, as he took a pinch of snuff, whatever spiteful Whigs might say to the contrary. He knew full well that Mr. Pitt would combat such a measure with all his might if his health permitted it. But Mr. Pitt was away at Bath—extremely ill—so ill, indeed, that some affected to reckon his life by hours. This was quite

a merciful dispensation, thought the minister ; for if Pitt were to come and worry him now he must certainly go distraught, torn in half by opposing patriots. But Mr. Pitt was safely on the shelf, so he could smack his lips, and flap his wings, and talk big about his policy.

A stamp-act on the American people would, he said, be a nice little experiment towards further mulcting—a crafty precedent. They might object a little at first, but that was of no consequence. The plan, moreover, was sure to meet with favour in England as a measure that promised to shift the costs of the late war from home shoulders to those of distant colonists. Everybody was delighted. How clever ! What a brilliant thought ! What a subtle stroke of genius ! George Grenville bowed graciously and flapped away, for he perceived Lord Bute approaching followed by Sim Ames.

Sim Ames had already been spoken to by his master and was highly amused, though somewhat perplexed. He was, as we have seen, in the pay of both parties : for Lord Bute awarded him a handsome salary as protector-in-chief of his valuable person, while Stone gave occasional money presents and rich promises on condition of his acting as a spy upon the doings of the favourite. Stone had an additional hold too upon him, in that he knew from Bambridge sundry details of his life which would tell awkwardly if narrated before a magistrate.

Therefore he had consented to the ex-tutor's wishes, reserving to himself the right of only repeating so much as circumstances might point to as judicious. Once he said idly to his master that if the people knew so much of their idol's private life as he did they might be ashamed of worshipping him, and his lord caught up his words. How did he know aught of Wilkes's private life? Perceiving a pit-fall, he stammered as excuse that he was intimate with Wilkes's valet, that that worthy was in the habit of drinking burnt sherry with him at the Lamb and Breeches while his patron was inditing his *North Briton* at the Feathers over the way. Cross-examined he admitted that he knew the Colonel's compositor, who sometimes printed queer scraps of literature for the amusement of the gay dogs at Medmenham. Lord Bute's scheme was settled. He saw a means of crushing his foe. In delight he presented his henchman to the minister.

“Ames,” he said with melodious dignity, pointing his toe that wandering nymphs might be ravished by the sight of his leg in profile—“Sim, you have the honour to be presented to a minister; one who possesses the confidence of his Majesty, whom Heaven preserve! You are a worthy fellow, Sim, and faithful, I verily believe. Relate to Mr. Grenville that of which you spoke to me t'other night.”

Lord Bute's accents of subdued sadness, har-

monious as the chords of an *Æolian* harp, would have made Mr. Garrick frantic with envy. No doubt his lordship was a great actor who, having (as many of us do) mistaken his vocation, chose the boards of St. Stephen's instead of Drury Lane. At the former he certainly was a failure, but so would you be, dear friend, who are recognised as an admirable cutter for Messrs. Snip, if you elected to struggle instead with a shoemaker's last. The aspect of unmerited persecution bravely borne could not have been more artistically assumed than it was by my Lord Bute. Yet the effect of the assumption was somewhat marred by a nervous start. Poor victim of a pen as forcible as bitter! In the midst of his exordium he turned pale, for there was a stir without suggestive of eggs and cats. He concealed his leg quickly in the folds of his mantle, and brought down the red wig over his brow after a fashion more secretive than becoming.

But it was a false alarm. The leg in a pink stocking peered forth again like a roseate sun from behind a shower-cloud. The envious wig was pushed away. My lord came to the point of the interview.

“What was all this about Colonel Wilkes's poetry?” he asked.

“Nothing very remarkable,” Sim answered, feeling his way. “My friend showed me a page or two of it—a thing which he was printing in scarlet for the

Medmenham brotherhood. An ‘Essay on Woman,’ parodying the ‘Essay on Man.’ A sweet thing, I should say, when finished. Here’s a page of it.”

The minister and favourite pored over the soiled scrap. Both blushed in an attempt to appear shocked, which the twinkle in their eyes belied. As regarded them Sim felt quite easy now. Deceitful and mean both. More so than he was himself in that he professed nothing—not even the remnant of a conscience ; whilst they were swelling themselves out in imitation of the outraged turkey. Surely it was no wrong to deceive such arrant and transparent knaves ? Their transparency was an extra cause for offence in Sim’s eyes. It was clumsy of them to be so easily read ! If a knave, by all means a complete one. Anything which is complete commands the respect due to all perfection. But this was shallow knavery below contempt.

“ Woful ! absolutely woful !” Grenville cried, looking up in the solemn visage of my Lord Bute.

“ The hardiest inhabitant of hell,” dolefully echoed my lord, “ would tremble to hear such a poem read !”

“ The writer of such lines would debauch the principles of the ignorant whom he pretends to lead. He shall be put down as an apostle of the devil for the public good,” decided Grenville. “ His private character shall be blasted. We will brand him as

a prurient debauchee who breaks his lance against virtue, religion, and humanity. Let us see if the mob will dare to support him then—if the fools whom Whitefield and Wesley dazzled will dare openly to espouse the cause of one whom we will mark as a blasphemer and an atheist. They will perforce resign their idol, and, like errant sheep without a shepherd, will meekly beg admittance into our fold."

This "Essay on Woman"—this hideous, blasphemous poem of Colonel Wilkes's—could Sim obtain a copy of the whole?

Sim hummed and hawed, and twisted his three-cornered hat. It would be scurvy of him to betray his printing friend to danger.

"Your printing friend shall be looked after," Grenville cried promptly. "So shall you. Procure us this poem, and your reward shall be a rich one. The rascal dared to call me a 'nasty, gummy, blubbering, blustering, overgrown, tame puppy-dog to a Scotch beggar!' He shall rue it. Oh! that our holy religion should be thus trodden under foot. In her sacred name we are bound to exterminate the reptile!"

Both Grenville and his ally looked monstrous pious, turning up their eyes, squaring shoulders, shaking ruffles back in their horror at the awful poem, one torn rag of which they had been permitted to contemplate. Sim could scarce forbear a

shout as he surveyed the pair. Canting hypocrites! It would be a virtue to take their money and deceive them. Not that he was at all taken in by Colonel Wilkes's blarney. In his mind it was a question merely of expediency; for by an accident he found himself well in both camps. Which was going to bear away the victory? If he only could tell that! Hastily he reviewed pros and cons ere he made a plunge. John Wilkes, Colonel of militia, clever, out at elbows, with all to gain and little to lose—his trump-card a marvellous and growing influence with the people. Good so far. What did he hope to gain? A vague idea guided him which pointed to being bought off. The more popular he made himself, the higher his price would become. Colonel Wilkes's career was promising. But then had he not provoked the wrath of King, Princes, favourite, ministers, and the whole Scottish nation? Dangerous foes separate; bound together invincible avengers. Surely he would go to the wall in the unequal strife? Yes! Better to gain *κυδος* by betraying him to the stronger party. How difficult it was to steer safely through such troubled waters! Sim Ames resolved to try, forgetful of the two warning proverbs, one of which speaks of falling 'twixt two stools, the other of iron pots and earthen pipkins.

“I could no doubt get you the entire poem, gentlemen,” Sim faltered humbly; “but think of

the danger to my dear friend the printer—nay, even to yourselves—if the populace were not convinced. King Mob waxes dreadfully strong, and seems inclined to show his prowess. Wheelbarrows are set across the way at sunset; ladies are hustled within a stone's-throw of the palace; the King himself is not free from insult. A gentleman may take a voyage at sea with less hazard than he can travel ten miles from the metropolis. The weavers are angry about French silks; the sailors are furious over the press-gangs; the colliers have a separate grievance, so have the tailors and the wigmakers. It would take but little to set London in a flame from end to end!"

"Sirrah," interrupted my Lord Bute coldly, "your opinion is not invited on such matters. Can you get us this poem and a few other trifles of the kind secretly and speedily?"

"Yes, my lord, I can," returned Sim; adding with a dash of mischief, "but who shall swear that the Colonel wrote the trash?"

That was awkward. The twain felt it so, and scratched their noses reflectively. What a pity it would be if this scheme for crushing their foe should prove not to be feasible? It must succeed by hook or crook. If it did, his Majesty would be so pleased that he would endure for the future any amount of bullying on the part of Bute and Grenville. Their party would triumph. Pitt and his strait-laced non-

sense would be relegated to the lumber-room for ever as old-fashioned. Succeed ! Why not ? The poem was at all events printed at Wilkes's press. Witnesses should be produced to swear Wilkes wrote it. Another would not be likely to come forward and claim an authorship which might carry with it ear-cropping. Yes ! The poem should be brought up in Parliament held in a pair of tongs ; rosemary should be burnt the while to counteract the brimstone savour ; on the strength of it Wilkes should be arrested and shut up ; his house ransacked ; and it would be strange indeed if the search brought nothing up to ruin him. A delectable scheme ! For a heavy price Sim promised to procure the verses ; and further details were about to be discussed, when a peculiar stumping on the pavement became audible which caused Bute to look round surprised, while Grenville shook with terror.

It was not possible ! Surely he was far away. Those could not be the crutches of the Great Commoner ! Just now too ; how provoking ! When preparations for the Stamp-act were in full swing ; when the oration was half prepared, which was to carry conviction to all hearts, and glibly transfer grave responsibilities to innocent shoulders. If Mr. Pitt were really come, there would be no end to the trouble. He was so vexatious, so opinionated, so obstinate, so romantic. The best plan would be to

tell him of the anti-Wilkes plot. It would distract his attention from the American scheme, which of the two was far the most important. But it could not be—yes ! it was. There was the well-known gaunt figure, a trifle more bent and thin, surmounted by the big periwig, and the great awful nose. Mr. Pitt himself in flesh and blood was advancing towards the group through an avenue of silent and respectful by-standers.

“ Go see to this at once,” murmured Bute to his henchman. Then turned to point his toe and shake his ruffle in his best obeisance.

“ What an unexpected pleasure !” stammered uneasy Grenville. “ We feared you were laid up with gout at Bath.”

“ *Hoped*, you mean,” retorted his brother-in-law sternly. “ You see I am not dead yet. From the verge of the grave I have come to stand, if I may, between you and ruin. Between you two, you have obscured the glory of the war, surrendered the nation’s interests, sacrificed public honour. The days of Newcastle are come again. What more evil is there left for you to do ?” Mr. Pitt leaned forward on his long crutches, peering into their abashed faces with his searching eye. Both were surprised and pleased to see how ill he looked. Verily, a corpse bereft of winding-sheet which had risen from its tomb to make them uncomfortable. “ You intend, I hear, to tax America,” he

continued abruptly ; “ that is the rock upon which you will split. Not you only, but all England, and for ever. The Americans are the sons, not the bastards, of England. Taxation is no part of the governing power, for taxes are the voluntary grant of the Commons. When they grant, they grant that which is their own. In this matter what do you grant ; what ? The property of his Majesty’s Colonial Commons in America. Absurd and wicked robbery, which, if they are men, they will resent. I have been brought to London to protest against you from my bed. If, when the time comes, I am speechless in my latest agony, I will yet bear silent testimony against your crimes ! ”

How very unpleasant of Mr. Pitt to have come to town in this crabbed frame of mind, when everything was running upon wheels. Where was the crowd vanished which but now congratulated Grenville on his cleverness ? The appearance of the terrible statesman, shattered, out of office though he was, produced among the modish loiterers much the effect of a hawk’s advent in a dove-cote. The lords and ladies fluttered away. As he was out of power there was nothing to be gained by fawning on him ; why then should they run the gauntlet of his scorn ? What possessed him to totter about Westminster Abbey, when he ought to be in bed ? He took a delight no doubt in playing nightmare.

Lord Bute drooped in haughty picturesqueness, leaving the hapless bat to face the angry Patriot. It behoved him to change the subject to less dangerous ground, so George Grenville straightway commenced gabbling anent his wrongs and the infamy of Wilkes. Swaying on his wooden supports Pitt listened with clouded brow, till of a sudden seizing in his hand a crutch he whirled it round his head with a fierce curse. George Grenville nearly jumped out of his skin from fright. The dreadful Commoner was become more objectionable even than he used to be. There ought to be a law passed for placing in strait-waistcoats all wild men with fiery tempers.

“Fool! fool! fool!” cried out Mr. Pitt in long-drawn mournfulness. “Is your folly to have no bounds? Is unhappy England, whom I spent my best years in raising from the earth, to sink and drown in a bed of slime more foul than that in which I found her? Is the brother of my poor Hester to do this deed—to go down to all posterity as the worst minister that was ever permitted to misrule? Cannot you see what you bring upon yourself and all of us? By one stroke you set our colonies in revolt, by the next you fire England from Land’s End to John o’ Groat’s. Oh God! To slay this man should be no murder!”

Mr. Pitt, a prey to overwhelming bitterness, stood

erect, a pale flush spreading over his emaciated features, a frenzied glare shining in his eyes. Grenville whimpered. Lord Bute leaned against a pillar amazed. Mr. Pitt tottered and pressed both his thin hands to his temples.

“It is nothing now,” he muttered. “Yet these men will kill me—such rotten branches as they are should be lopped off.” Then with greater calm he continued, “No one condemns the numbers of the *North Briton* more than I. They are illiberal, unmanly, and detestable. But you must come at the author fairly. You propose to arrest him for putting forth a poem which perhaps he never wrote. How arrest him?”

“By a general warrant,” replied Grenville. “Why not?”

“Because such warrants are illegal,” thundered Pitt, bringing his crutch with a sharp ring upon the pavement; “because they are an open breach of the constitution, to take liberties with which is to sin against the very being and life of Parliament! Where the law ends, remember, tyranny begins. To purloin a paper, arbitrarily lock up its owner, and pry into his correspondence, would be an act of treachery so gross that it must overreach itself. The mob will look upon their hero as a martyr!”

“But he is a blasphemer!” pleaded Grenville piteously. “Bear in mind that his profane talk

frightened two harlequins once out of the green-room at Drury Lane!"

"I am indeed very feeble," returned the Great Commoner faintly. "In this matter I am practically powerless, and can only implore you to beware. In the other one I will oppose you to the utmost. Though my infirmities place me on the confines of another world, yet would I secure for others blessings I cannot hope long to enjoy myself. The rights of the people are torn down. Who shall blame them if they turn? You trample on the laws as pigs trample pearls—those laws which sprang from the stern virtues of our ancestors, the iron barons of King John. By acting as you propose you will make the King's crown not worth his wearing." Hues as of death crept over the speaker's face. "I am very ill. Help me to my coach," he whispered.

Leaning heavily upon his brother-in-law's arm Pitt tottered to his carriage, while Grenville wondered whether he would be well enough to oppose his pet measure. Oh, purblind bat and wicked turn-coat! did not the sight of this mighty wreck soften his heart? No. He who is wrapped in conceit is indeed thrice-armed. His own monument towers before his eyes. He can perceive nothing but the fictitious virtues and fulsome flattery inscribed thereon.

Grenville would not be warned. Presently he

returned to his ally, and the couple strode away—the blind leading the blind—to the favourite's residence; while Grenville rubbed his hands, and murmured as he did so, “What an insufferable old nuisance it is! Only to think that I used to admire him once. Broken-down statesmen ought to be smothered like hydrophobiacs. Which is master now—he or I? We ran into debt to protect these colonies. Now when told to contribute a share towards expenses, are they to flout the authority of the mother country? I trow not. Mr. Pitt is doting. Such nonsense about revolt! We will put down any attempts at revolt with an iron hand. A nice little stamp-tax shall be imposed upon America, and Wilkes shall be imprisoned in spite of old Pitt's ravings. His *North Briton* shall be burnt by the common hangman. His printer shall stand in the pillory, the seditious rascal, and then be branded. We will make much of this blaspheming poem when we get it, and then if the insolent Colonel is not annihilated—why, write me down an ass. The King looks for decisive action. He shall have it.”

It is wonderful how fond weak men are of prating about the “iron hand,” and it is surprising too how, when driven to it, they will don a fleeting semblance of bravery. A rat at bay will fly at your throat. But will a bat? We shall see. Truly George Grenville was brewing storms most guilelessly.

Pitt alone perceived them, and the disasters they would bring about. Yet could he do naught but weep and wring his hands—he the pure, the wise, the far-seeing !



CHAPTER IV.

THE LAYING OF THE TRAIN.

SIM AMES went blithely on his way, his good-natured rosy face breaking into dimples. His interview with the drivers of the state-chariot gave much food for thought, for the guiding principles of the great ones of the earth were apparently no better than his own. Indeed they were considerably worse, for he never pretended to any principles whatever, save such as in wild beasts come under the generic name of instinct; principles which bade him devour animals less strong than himself, wag his tail for a moment when one was kind to him, but above all things be vigilant as to No. 1. The grandees with whom he had been conversing were quite of another cast. They cloaked their spitefulness under a mask of virtue, their malice under a semblance of religious indignation. To a shrewd and cynical observer

like Sim Ames it was very comical. Were they self-deceivers or did they merely assume their mountebank costume with an intention of deceiving him, and so smirching, as little as might be, their own dignity? At all events it was quite fair to hoodwink such men, and hoodwinked they should be; so Sim determined, in so far as was advisable. They should have their poem, upon possession of which they laid such stress. There was no difficulty in getting hold of it, for he, Sim, could easily obtain access at any time to Wilkes's apartments by declaring he had something to communicate, and once there the drawers were at his mercy, for Wilkes was the most careless of agitators—leaving his keys, his money when he had any, and the corrected proofs of his literary efforts, strewn upon the floor or in the coal-scuttle after the fashion of many a man of greater genius. Sim felt no compunction as to the double game he proposed to himself to play; for Wilkes was thrumming upon the vulgarest chords of King Mob's nature with an unaffected cynicism as great as was his own. He liked Wilkes personally because he was ever bright and gay, was always prepared with a quip or crank. He liked, but could not respect, one who wore his motley so loose and open. No doubt it was wicked to betray him to the enemy, yet after all was he not so clever as to be able to slip out of their fingers in a trice, like an eel, if he chose? Like another good-

humoured Judas, Sim palliated his treachery to himself with Judas's excuse. It might be annoying for a moment or two, but he could get out of the dilemma the instant he thought fit. Mr. Stone, Wilkes's ally, Sim did not like. He feared his wolf-like smile and quiet ways, as appertaining to one who would not hesitate to stab you between the shoulders in the dark. Sim would feel pleasure in betraying Mr. Stone should an opportunity present itself. Yet was it prudent to be ostensibly well with him, for in the tournament which grew daily more likely to take place, there was really no telling whether one or other or both combatants would measure their length upon the sod. Grenville was no match for Wilkes in cleverness. The latter could dance round his adversary, playfully pricking him till he roared ere he gave the *coup de grâce*, but then Grenville was sheathed in a stout suit of armour. King, cabinet, favourite, were all upon his side. So Sim determined to play one off against the other so far as might be managed without committing himself until it should become evident which side was to be victorious. Then he would bravely rush into the breach and gain, if might be, a harmless little scalp-wound, by an artless display of which to the conqueror he could show how great had been his zeal.

Then his thoughts turned to Jasper. It was now a month since that worthy vanished. He lay im-

prisoned in the Fleet, languishing once more under the paternal care of Bambridge. Old Hannah, when she heard of it, rushed round Rosemary Mead like the mad-woman that she was, shaking her shrivelled fists at the stars, pouring curses in torrents between her clenched teeth, and then knelt under the corpses on the gibbet to brood and gibber. Then she stole softly to her mimic prison, and sat with her ear to the wooden panel through the chilly night, drinking in the howls of the animals within, marking how one whining hungry muzzle after another sniffed hopelessly at the chink below the door.

“He’s awful bad,” the gang had heard her mutter. “Bambridge is well-nigh starved. But he mustn’t die yet, his time’s not come. I must give him a scrap of meat to keep body and soul together.”

When the gang returned from a raid one morning, clamouring loudly for breakfast and heated crucibles, they were surprised to find her cloaked as for a journey.

“Light your own fires henceforth,” she said. “I’m going to give myself to Bambridge. He sought my favours once, and I would none of him. If he wills it he may take me now. I am his for evermore in exchange for the life of Jasper.”

The situation was so tragic that none laughed; not even Sim, who was far from sentimental. What

new craze possessed the unhappy maniac? Poor pitiful, sorrow-stained, old mad hag of a Judith, sallying forth for the conquest of Holofernes! Her grey elf-locks were decently smoothed, and she had tired her head for the sacrifice. Twenty years back perhaps, ere Bambridge set his mark on her, she might have been comely enough. How ghastly a notion this of gravely offering to her butcher the wreck of the beauty his cruelty had destroyed! She was not permitted to go on her errand, though she raved and stormed. Sim said he dared not show himself within the liberties lest Bambridge or Corbett, the tipstaff, should elect to keep him in durance vile. For both those janitors had an unpleasant way of ignoring the strict course of law when it crossed their own desires, and it was more than probable that the jailer of the Fleet was aware of Master Ames's connection with the gang. Moreover a coolness had sprung up between Scratchpole and his lieutenant which fully justified the latter in declining to risk liberty for his chief. Not so with Nimming Ned and Marjoram, both of whom declared with emphatic knee-slaps that Scratchpole was a trump who should not be deserted in his extremity. The two were to be seen constantly prowling about the liberties elaborately disguised, nor did Sim try to stay them though he now assumed the gang's command. He was sore with Jasper no longer; and was quite loyal enough to be

glad were he to escape, provided his own neck ran no risk in the affair. He did not know that Jasper owed his incarceration to the machinations of his own half patron Stone, neither was he aware that Mr. Meadows had also taken to showing himself of late in the purlieus of the Fleet, there to hold mysterious interviews with the warden of the prison.

Upon leaving the abbey, Sim strolled along whistling towards Soho, when who should he meet, face to face, but one of the subjects of his thoughts. Andrew Stone nodded affably, wishing him good-morrow as he picked his way among the holes and posts and piles of stones which made pretence to be a high-road. A disgraceful condition of things the London streets presented, he was thinking ; a dangerous state, yet one for which one should be thankful, with the prospect of impending riots.

“How easily could barricades be run up,” he remarked innocently ; “with what facility might a charge of troops be rendered impossible. Verily the Government plays into our hands. Good-day to you, Mr. Ames ; the very man I wished to see. Where are you going ? to the Lamb and Breeches ? Postpone that visit and walk with me across the fields, I want to speak to you.”

Nothing loth, Sim complied, for according to his present plan it was as well to hear what all parties had to say. Stone had something very particular indeed to say, but knew not how to say it.

For some time they walked in silence ; Stone was revolving in his mind the best manner of making this new tool of his as serviceable as possible.

Meadows was helpless, we know, to prevent Jasper from being handed over to the warden of the Fleet, though he personally declined to prosecute. The man was shut up upon the order of a justice of the peace on suspicion, because there were found upon his person a crape, a map, and other articles sacred to the calling of collectors. Stone's malice was so far satisfied ; but Meadows, if idle and lymphatic, was good-hearted. He was grateful for the episode of the ring. That Jasper should be freed he was secretly determined ; how, was a matter for afterthought. He strove to buy him of Bambridge, but the latter was too pleased to get back the victim of his singular tyranny for the thing to be so speedily settled. Once in the warden's keeping, Stone considered him safe, and for the present busied his head about him no more. No one but his sister was the least interested in obtaining a trial for him. She was gone abroad, where the nimble-brained ex-tutor resolved she should remain. The unfortunate man might languish thus for years (like the victim of a *lettre de cachet* in the Bastille) untried, uncondemned, but forgotten. Meadows was constitutionally so lazy that his good intentions would very probably have ended in a yawn, but for a casual rencontre with Nimming Ned, when both happened to be prowling in the liberties

for the same object. Fortuitously they met; by the merest chance they scraped acquaintance, through the relating of the ring anecdote over a bottle in a tavern. Meadows was fond of relating the story; Ned, who was dressed like a sober attorney, had heard it from Sim as a blot upon their captain's renown. Both these apparently dissimilar men seemed urged to the same end. Ned knew and loved the imprisoned one, no matter why; Mr. Meadows, for reasons of his own, was determined to procure his release. They opened their minds to one another, and it was decided, by Ned's advice, that the only thing to be done was for Meadows to bring his influence to bear upon his friends to procure an immediate trial of the accused at one of the lesser courts. No one cared what took place in those lesser courts except those who were personally concerned. Stone, trusting to Bambridge's safe guardianship of the prisoner, would know nothing about it till all was over. No one would prosecute. Jasper would come off scot-free for want of evidence. Bambridge himself need know nothing of it till his victim was suddenly claimed and tried. Such was the condition of the law at this period, and these were the means employed by such as had potent friends outside in order to slip through its meshes.

Nimming Ned was enchanted to have found a powerful ally; and these details settled, bethought

him that it might be well to speak a word or two of comfort to the prisoner.

Oddly enough he had himself managed so far to evade the thief-catchers; therefore he knew nothing of the Fleet save ugly rumours of the horrors which obtained there. To ensure his own safety he donned my Lord Bute's livery, in which (under Sim's auspices) he was still to be seen sometimes clinging with others behind a coach, and boldly entered the common side of the prison. My Lord Bute was, it will be remembered, himself in the habit of exercising picturesque charity among the prisoners. He it was who, struck by Sim's cheerful aspect, bought him from Bambridge all those years ago. The sight of my lord's livery within those grim precincts produced no surprise, for of late most of the favourite's charity had been done by deputy. So Ned wandered from group to group in search of his leader without let or hindrance. Vainly he sought among the knots of sodden unkempt faro-players for his chief. They looked up with dim hopeless eyes, and perceiving that as the new-comer was a servant, there could be little hope of "garnish," quickly resumed their gambling. Presently they were all summoned by a turnkey to receive such rations as his fancy dictated in the wine-chamber next the porter's lodge; and one, marking as he shuffled by the domestic's bewildered air, whispered that perhaps the man he sought was the one who

languished in the strong-room. What strong-room? That dark hole like a rabbit-burrow away at the extreme end of the inner court.

It was Jasper sure enough, calling in vain on death to free him from his sufferings. He lay heavily fettered to the floor by an iron chain in a darksome vault, through which ran open the common sewer. Light and air filtered feebly into the noisome place through a square wicket in the padlocked door. Ned, recognising the well-known voice, murmured through the chink a few cheering words, looking about the while lest Bambridge should be watching, and inquired, whilst assuring him of speedy deliverance, if there were aught which he would wish done at once.

“Yes; oh yes!” groaned Jasper. “Is my sister safe?”

“Certainly she is. At least tattlers say that she is gone to Saxony.”

“Then,” Jasper moaned, “give me paper and a pencil that I may make shift to scribble a line, which the porter at Tewkesbury House, knowing my hand, will send by special courier.”

Ned jerked the materials through the wicket; there was a sound of clanking iron and of blindly groping hands; and a moment later a head appeared at the opening, the aspect of which filled the highwayman with horror. The prisoner wore an instrument known to Bambridge’s victims as the

“helm ;” which was formed of steel rings, that clasped the skull closely, while two iron nobs, fitted over the orbits, were pressed by screws upon the eyeballs. Marks upon his pallid skin showed where the metal ate into the flesh. He smiled sadly at Ned’s exclamation of terror.

“Alas ! I cannot see,” he said. “I hope this scrap is legible, and not too much stained with blood. You will be rewarded in heaven, Ned, for thus playing the Samaritan.”

Ned took and delivered the paper, then went back to Sot’s Hole, relieved to think that his chief would soon be free again, and indirectly by his means. He said nothing of it to Sim, however, for that person was growing niggard of his enthusiasm.

Such unusual decision and activity of mind as Mr. Meadows was displaying were too much for that worthy. Beyond the exertions which the procuring of a trial necessitated, he was unfit for anything. He gave way under Stone’s constant lectures, and authorised him at last to take what steps he chose with regard to the absent Duchess. Her enemy’s plans were changing every day ; what did he propose to do now ? As matters stood there was little use in trying to set aside the will ; for unfortunately it was proved to be in perfect order. Her Grace entered unchallenged upon possession of her wealth. The servants, who, under pressure of excitement, had made random statements, held their tongues

and declined to speak a word. They had good places and intended to keep them. All efforts to wring anything from Jasper were of no avail. The man's obstinacy was disgusting. He seemed inured to pain. The only thing to be done with him was to endeavour to break his spirit by slow torture. Sadly the schemer returned to his old project, so easy of realisation once—so apparently impossible now. Wilkes was never tired of laughing at his wild plots; and his gibings set him on his metal. The Duchess absent, her brother caged, Mr. Stone had the coast clear for the free exercise of his talents. But those talents, which had been in constant exercise during so many years, had, as yet, produced very small results. As time went on it seemed to become more and more difficult to prove that her Grace of Tewkesbury was really Countess Bellasis. Oh, Deborah, Deborah! where was she? And what did it matter after all where she was? The faithful maid would surely not peach upon her mistress; and she was the only eye-witness of the Bath mistake who could possibly be brought forward to assist in transferring to their rightful owner those much-coveted Tewkesbury acres.

Though his jokes were rude and ribald, there was truth in what Wilkes pointed out. Money and revenge for past injuries could only be secured through Meadows, by procuring for him his rights. Every plot, every scheme invariably started from

that point. Stone quite blushed in that he should be so helpless. The sister away, the brother locked up, it were hard if something could not now be managed. The country should be scoured, he determined, until the abigail were found. When found, strong pressure should be brought to bear on her, and it would be hard if they could not amongst them oust the Duchess and bring her to her knees. Yes; a search should be inaugurated forthwith, since there was no one now to forestall their moves; and in the search Sim Ames might prove of use, for he must know his late father's haunts, to one of which perhaps the forlorn widow had retired.

Therefore Mr. Stone was glad of the opportunity of a quiet walk across the fields alone with the parson's son.

When such portions of the scheme as seemed advisable were laid before Meadows, that sleepy heir-at-law was dumbfounded. He could not believe that the great Duchess, the mirror of fashion, the *grande dame par excellence*, could have been guilty of such dubious vagaries.

“ You are too crafty, dear Mr. Stone,” he said, shaking his wig. “ Our good Colonel here says you are too crafty, and that being so, your fancy endows others with your own attributes. You should have been a statesman, for your long head would have baffled every ambassador in Europe.”

By dint of continual worrying, however, the heir-

at-law gave way. Her Grace had been as good to him as the Duke would allow; and being, above all things, of a grateful turn, he bore her no malice for possession of the acres. Yet it did seem quite right that she should be made to disgorge them if it could be proven that she held them through a fraud. At the idea that perchance she had never been a duchess at all his eyes fairly goggled in his head. Was Jasper a witness to the alleged marriage? he inquired. "Unluckily he was not," the tutor answered sighing, "or we would force testimony from him."

"Then he is of no use to us," returned Meadows with relief, "and we will set the poor fellow free."

Stone, despite his many anxieties and the tangled skein he was trying to unravel, was tickled by the artlessness of the suggestion.

"My dear friend," he laughed, "you ought to have been an Israelite indeed, for in you there is no guile! Why, he is his sister's staunch ally, her right hand. When we start off to hunt our hare, poor puss must find her holes stopped, or we may fail to bag her. Leave him where he is. The Duchess is dancing jigs in Saxony. Let her dance there till she has danced off her shoes. If I can help it she shall not need another pair. Not that the matter is certain. Far from it. Do not be sanguine."

Now, stupid and sleepy as he was, Meadows was

endowed with those gentlemanly feelings which it befits the rightful heir of the premier duke of England to possess. A dim light flickered in his brains. She was always kind, was her Grace, and certainly strove to patch up his quarrel with the Duke. It was not fair to run down a woman thus. Let the game be played if need be, but let there be no cards up sleeves or on the floor. Jasper was her staunch ally, was he ? Very well then. All the more reason for procuring his freedom now, that he might comfort his sister in her approaching strait. It was loyally decided on the part of Meadows, whose breeding had been carried on by a fond parent in the country, where modish high-class vices do not as yet obtain. It would seem as if well-nigh all the characters in this our chronicle were stained with vice ! as if the lofty virtues which we would delight to portray were not to be found in any of them. Alas ! these our characters are town-bred. Our scenes lie either at the Bath or in London, to either of which towns it would be hard to bestow the palm of wickedness, so closely do they race. We have to deal with the upper classes, than which no aristocracy of any land was ever more debased, by play, by vanity, or ignorance. Perhaps in the next century all may be changed. The lords and ladies may be charming pure ; drunkenness may be disapproved ; gambling frowned upon. It may be that they will be able to read and write and avail

themselves of the privilege. Nowadays my Lord Modish would shame to spell as well as a city clerk, whilst, as for perusing any books but cards, he would shudder at so vulgar an idea. Yes; these our characters are all tainted by their city breeding. Maybe some day we will tell another tale, wherein the damsels shall be milk and water, the swains' heads filled with bran. Lambkins shall bleat and gambol, Corins shall pipe, Chloes shall trill dulcet melodies. What a sweet pastoral will that story be ! But this story is of 1760 and what not. We must take our characters as we find them.

Sim and Stone strolled quietly together through Soho, and turned on the right to Bloomsbury. The latter, astute though he was, was not clear enough in language to please shrewd Sim. Mr. Stone wanted to make of him a cat's-paw of some kind, so much was evident.

“ Why not be plain-spoken at once ? ” he blurted out. “ You want to find my step-mother for some reason of your own. What then ? You offer a large reward. Therefore I can be of use. Did Jasper know whither she retired ? you ask. Why should he ? He never, that I knew of, was on friendly terms with her. I am a dear friend of Jasper's, am I ? Well, I was. No matter how, or why ; but of late we have become estranged. Would I mind doing something to which he would object ? Man alive, I am not his slave, and have had enough

of his domineering airs. I am not particular as to what I do, provided I am well paid for it. Murder, of course, excepted."

By accident Stone had struck the right chord. He perceived and struck it again.

"I apologise," he murmured affably, "if I hurt your feelings relative to Jasper. But I certainly was under a vague impression that you trusted much to his superior parts. No offence. He is in gaol, poor fellow, where he will certainly remain until we think fit to send him to Tyburn. So no more of him." Then Mr. Stone turned and faced his companion, eyeing him keenly as they stood together on the narrow footpath across the fields leading from Bloomsbury to Mary le Bone Gardens. He flicked the long, discoloured autumn grass with his switch, then held out his hand with an engaging show of fangs such as rather repelled Sim Ames than claimed his confidence. "You are right, young man!" he assented. "Why beat about the bush? You want your price. I want, no matter what. Vengeance for piled-up slights perhaps. Yes. That is what I want," he continued half to himself. "To her I owe the overthrow of my Pegasus in mid-career. She caused me to be imprisoned for a foolish jest at the turning of my tide. To her I owe disgrace, plans nipped, projects blasted. Yes, damn her! I swore I would bide my time and ruin her when the propitious hour

came. Now that hour should be nigh at hand ! If you still loved her bastard brother I would not trust you. But you say you do not, and I believe you. This *soi-disant* Duchess shall be un-ducassed and dishonoured, and through me. Will you serve me in this truly ? Will you help me to seek out your father's widow ?"

"I will," replied Sim promptly ; and the pair shook hands upon it, while Sim bethought himself with mirth of what a series of cabals he was apparently to be the centre. It behoved him to be cautious, for if he played not his game carefully, into what a boiling kettle might he not find himself incontinently plunged ! A little care and all would go well, no doubt ; he would accept every bobbin that was offered him and disentangle it at leisure.

They were just coming to the cross-roads where the gang waited on the night of the Duke's death only a few weeks ago. Yet how changed was the aspect of affairs ! The Duke was dead, the Duchess flown, her brother languishing in prison. The palace of the Tewkesburys shut up and desolate. Its closely-shuttered windows were visible like rows of sightless eyes, from where they stood. No champing of horses in the court-yards now. No hustling of porters and swinging of sedans. No sweeping of female skirts or patter of wooden heels. The noble widow was dancing in another land, while her lord mouldered in the family vault. Not a sign

of life. Yes, one ! Stone with a cry of astonishment dashed off along the road ; leaving Sim to follow with his hat and wig, dropped in the hurry of flight. What was it that produced such excitement in the ordinarily sedate ex-tutor ? A woman was battering at the door of Tewkesbury House, and very hot and angry she looked with fruitless hammering. None took any heed of her. The old hall-porter, expecting no visitors of quality, slumbered peacefully by his fireside, mumbling as he turned in sleep :

“ Let the untimely visitor bang till his hands are sore. The bell is swaddled up. Why do people come worritting when her Grace is beyond seas ? ”

Stone flew to the assistance of the woman, borne on wings of hope. Indeed the stars were propitious at last. His prayers were heard. The woman who was hammering with increasing choler was no other than his and our old friend Deborah, who was come at length to seek audience and to upbraid her mistress for leaving her so long in penury. Buried at Hampstead, she knew naught of the Duke’s accident. Jasper, as we know, was unable to reach her on the day of his arrest. The tradesmen were refusing credit. In spite of orders to the contrary, she donned her cardinal and sallied forth to find—what ? Tewkesbury House, seemingly uninhabited, resigned to ghosts. The family gone away, herself deserted ! She whom, when the parson died, the

Duchess promised to provide for. It was like the heartless cruel aristocracy, who were always prepared to accept any amount of devotion, then to fling aside the devotee like a soiled glove. The dudgeon of Madam Deborah increased with each succeeding knock. By the time Mr. Stone stood beside her she was bursting with passion.

“By my vitals, a nice thing!” she puffed out in gasps. “I, who am a living sacrifice to her, to be cheated in this scurvy way! She hath gone away to Tewkesbury Castle doubtless, there to flaunt with noble guests, then to squander away her wealth at Bath, whilst I am left to gnaw my nails for sustenance. What matter if Deborah have ne’er a loaf or dish of tea? Her Grace is sumptuously served. Quotha! Go your ways, my inquisitive gentleman. Heed not the just wrath of honest folk.”

“Madam Deborah, as I live!” ejaculated Stone in mock surprise. “The relict, if I mistake not, of my much-valued friend, good Parson Ames. You forget my face, yet you should remember it. Stone, Andrew Stone, at your service. We used to meet frequently. On one occasion, which should not escape you, we met by moonlight on Harrison’s Walk at Bath. In the year——”

“Hush!” interrupted Deborah, glancing fearfully at the windows. “Yes, I remember you, though I am too distracted to mind many a more familiar face. I am here to see the Duchess upon

business. Is it not strange that none will answer to my knocking ?”

Stone burst into a mocking laugh, which Deborah, who was no fool, might have recognised as overdone if she had not been much excited.

“ You may knock for many an hour and day and month, poor Madam Deborah !” scoffed Stone, whose sharp instinct began to teach him how the land lay. “ Her Grace is gone to Saxony to enliven with her presence the courts of foreign princes. It may be a year or more ere she returns. Why not write a note to her ?”

Deborah gave over knocking, and burst into tears of humiliation.

“ She cares not for me !” she wailed ; “ for me who served her through long and faithful years. She goes away leaving me to starve who trusted to her deceitful promises ! Oh, Mr. Stone ! it is a comfort to meet a friend. Where shall I go ? I have no money. I dare not return to the cottage, or the purveyors will be on me, and all Hampstead, which honoured me as one who had lived at Court, will gibe at the teller of idle tales. Woe is me ! Would that I slept beside my angel parson !”

At the affecting thought of bottle-nosed old Ames, late brandy parson of the Fleet, soaring in mid-ether as one of the elect, his widow sobbed as though her heart must break. Truly Mr. Stone’s star was in the ascendant. Deborah was sufficiently

aggrieved to forget all prudence in present tribulation.

“I am sorry for you,” observed Stone with pity. “You have been duped, poor lady. Her Grace promised you an income. Is it not so? I know it is, for I was present at the parsonage by chance on the day of your bereavement. She has not kept her word? Of course she has not—neither to you nor any one. You were dangerous then. You are no longer so. The great are adepts in the art of oblivion.”

Deborah scanned the speaker narrowly.

“If I were only certain this is no mistake!” she said slowly.

“There can be no mistake,” jeered Stone. “Listen!” He tapped at the window of the porter’s lodge. “Friend, friend!” he whispered. “Shake up your languid bones. It is I, Andrew Stone, whom you should know by this time. Say. Have you tidings of her Grace?”

“Her Grace reached Flushing in safety,” replied a gruff voice within. “Thence she journeyed by post. All letters are to be addressed to Dresden. A special courier took the last despatches three days since.”

“You see,” murmured Stone, “there is no mistake. She has deliberately gone upon a pleasure trip, leaving you, who are useless now, to die as soon as convenient. She knows you cannot pursue

her to Dresden. Friend, one word more. When doth she return?"

"I know not," returned the voice. "Ere she left she gave orders for doing up the reception-rooms. The mansion is to be garnished from top to bottom, though happily the workmen will not come in till spring."

"Good-night, friend!"

"Good-night, good Mr. Stone!"

The little window closed. Stone looked at Deborah, and she at him. The November evening was drawing in; the place deprived of its accustomed life was very dreary. Again the parson's widow began to whimper through sheer loneliness, remembering that in full belief in the bounty of her Grace she had recently so far regaled the midwives of Hampstead as to have spent her own private pittance to the uttermost farthing. There she stood shivering on the Mary le Bone Road with a tiny bundle in her hand, no penny-piece in her possession, her patroness many leagues away, her cottage beset by duns whose presence should have frightened Scaramouch and Columbine into life for the protection of their mistress. The world was all before her. The cold friendless world; with no one by to give a helping hand. Hastily she turned over in her head the persons to whom she might apply in her distress. There was Lady Gladys if she were in town, and the Princess Dowager. But

she remembered hearing that the latter august lady was drowning her sorrow by coquetting with a dairy; that she affected, consequent upon her estrangement from the King, bucolic tastes and a blighted digestion. Of course Lady Gladys was with her. What a plight for an unhappy creature who was wont to converse of her fine early life at Court! Where is her Grace's brother Jasper? "Also gone to Saxony," was the mendacious reply. Madam Deborah howled aloud.

Stone waited until she fully realised her position before he spoke.

"Now, Mrs. Ames," he said, "it is Heaven who sends me to you in your trouble for the righting of a grievous wrong. You see what her Grace's gratitude is worth. If she found you dead at her door she would cry, 'Sweep up the carrion!' and pass upon her way. It serves you right for a life of deceit. You can, so kind is Heaven, yet remedy your sin. Hearken to my words and weigh them well."

Madam Deborah was crouching against a pilaster at the inhospitable gate. Tears of cold, hunger, and depression were coursing down her cheeks. Her affectionate step-son sat on the bench at the cross-roads hard-by drinking ale, and marvelling at the conduct of this wily patron.

"What on earth is he doing to my step-mother?" he wondered. "He cannot be robbing or about to

murder her. In the latter case I should probably be bound to interfere. It would be improper to see one's step-mother slain in cold blood before one's eyes, I suppose. Most improper! Certainly I should have to interfere."

His meditations were cut short by a sharp whistle.

"Then it is settled," Stone was saying as he hurried up in obedience to the summons. "You will do what you can to get your crime condoned. Mr. Meadows is merciful. It is possible he may provide for you in a more substantial way than my lady Duchess did. You have been duped by her and by her brother. Now you must be guided entirely by me. You have your husband's papers—all?"

"Yes," sobbed hapless madam, squatting helpless in the mud. "I brought them with me lest the tradesmen should break in and sack the cottage. 'Cling to them,' poor Ames always said. 'They are worth thrice their weight in gold, those books are.' Dirty stuff! They never brought me a Queen Anne's farthing; for they seemed to hold all the entries which no one wants and none for which folks would pay. Not that I read them. God forbid. Records of the Fleet! Alack, alack! It is I who am punished for my cherub parson's sins!"

"Well, well; be comforted," responded the dark tutor benignly. "Angels rejoice over one sinner that repenteth, you know. Be steadfast. Sim, look

to your step-mother. Where will you find her a lodgings? It must be secret, and secure."

Sim revolved the question, scratching his head beneath his wig to quicken his ideas. His favourite resorts were scarcely fitting places for a lady to abide in. The Lamb and Breeches? No. Neither secret nor secure. Sot's Hole! The very place. No one could tamper with her there, for Hannah would glory in a living human prisoner, and Jasper was safely stowed within the Fleet. At all events it would do for a time. She had no baggage. A coach could drop them in the Fulham Road, whence he would conduct his father's widow through the coppice. Hastily he explained this to his patron, who acquiesced in the temporary arrangement.

Madam Deborah was too tired and wretched to vouchsafe an opinion. Too subdued was she even to gibe at her step-son as was her wont, or call him Ne'er-do-well, Come-to-gallows, Satan's-meat, after her endearing custom. In silence the coach lurched and rumbled along the deserted way, while Stone stepped briskly out in the opposite direction to inform Wilkes, if he were within, that he held at last the goose which was to try to lay a golden egg.



CHAPTER V.

COUNTERMINES.



UNHAPPILY for England at this juncture, Mr. Pitt's energy succumbed before the agony of his disease. George Grenville's brilliant plan for mulcting America of her dollars came before the House, backed by all my Lord Bute's influence, who, for the nonce, was on his side, and an edict went forth which should have roused the Pilgrim Fathers from their graves. The colonists were to be taxed forthwith. It was not that the burthen was to be fitted to their strength ; but that their backs were to be familiarised by custom to its heaviness. This having been settled to the minister's satisfaction with little opposition, he proceeded to increase in boldness. Sim, true to his word, rifled Colonel Wilkes's drawers, and produced therefrom a complete copy of a poetic effort entitled “An Essay on Woman,” together

with sundry other poetic scraps, wherein matters were scoffingly paraphrased which, be men's religious opinions what they may, are better left alone.

Grenville held up his hands with well-acted horror. "What a pity," he cried, "that the good old days of rack and fagot are past—the delightful days of Alva and Philip of Spain, for instance." It would have been so convenient to hand over the dangerous foe to Holy Church for that amiable parent to pinch and burn! The inquisition was no more, but laws still remained, not repealed, but only in abeyance, which should be made to reach the ribald demagogue. Though such a thing had not been done for years, it was still legal to bore a soldier's tongue for swearing. What engines then might not be set in motion to crush the author of so blasphemous a piece of flippancy as the "Essay on Woman?" Yet the path of the minister was beset with snares, of which the astute Colonel was sure to make the most. Certain people might object to seeing a man hounded down on the evidence of a privately printed paper stolen from his drawer. However, by some means or other he must be got rid of; there was no doubt of that; for both King and ministry were becoming more and more execrated day by day in consequence of his mischievous satire. His Majesty, who was a good hater, writhed under the lash of the *North Briton*—bubbled and boiled under

the imputations cast upon his mother. He was prepared to put up with any amount of hectoring on the part of Mr. Grenville, who baited him in private, if an example could only be made of this murderer of reputations. Should Mr. Grenville fail to do this thing, it was quite possible that some morning he might find himself thrust out of office.

Stupid George Grenville took rashness for resolution, and vowed that the King's desire should be satisfied. In spite of John and his iron barons, Wilkes should be arrested upon a general warrant, and his house searched afterwards for criminating evidence. Meanwhile the people should be made to see that their ministers were not to be trifled with. An awful ceremony was organised, which would be certain to instil terror into the boldest soul ; a ceremony theoretic enough to have emanated from my Lord Bute's fancy. After considerable vacillation Mr. Grenville decreed, that, on a certain day in December, the most obnoxious number of the *North Briton* should be publicly burnt by the common hangman, and its miserable ashes scattered to the winds of heaven. If the man might not be treated as he deserved, at least the produce of his brain should be. Solemnly the fearful rites were to be carried to their bitter end, and if every rebel spirit in England did not tremble at the sentence—why they must be more hardened even than George Grenville thought them.

It is the sad duty of the historian to relate many melancholy things which tend to hold up poor erring human nature in an unlovely light. This is one of them. The *ukase* went forth. No. 45 of the *North Briton* was to be executed at dawn on a given day with awful legal panoply. Its printer was to stand two hours on the pillory, and then be branded. The people—*laughed!!* Yes, all classes joined for once and laughed, though there was a difference in their method of cachinnation. The nobles thought it a merry conceit, and laughed till you could see down their throats; the lower orders grinned like hyenas, and there was something of the tiger in their merriment. But the bat flapped on heedless of rumbling thunder. The minister, having decided the grave question and assumed his pose, was for the future adamant. My Lady Chatham told her lord of it while administering gruel, and Mr. Pitt looked with such fiery eyes over the blankets that her ladyship quite jumped, and thought of Riding-hood and the wolf in her grandmother's night-cap. “Oh, grandmamma, what large teeth you have got!” “The better to eat you up, my dear!” Alas, there was very little of eating about Mr. Pitt. He sighed with the regret of one who leaves a beloved friend in a direful strait, and, turning his face towards the wall, considered his latter end.

Luckless No. 45, which, if left alone, would speedily have been forgotten, became, through the

egregious folly of a pert trifler, who presumed to don a giant's boots, a signal for the unchaining of every cur in the whole pack of sedition. The lower orders hated the nobles, as we know. Every trade had its grievance. The short but brilliant reign of Mr. Pitt did much to bind opposing classes together by uniting them against a foreign foe. He taxed them heavily, and they bore his stern rule with cheerfulness, for at least they got glory for their money. The star of the single-minded patriot paled; another took its place. A second patriot assumed for awhile the place of the first in men's affections, with views diametrically opposed to his. The first went proudly on his upright way, his path illumined by his own genius; too haughty to explain his motives. The second traded on the lowest human passions, working on the swinish ignorance which distinguished the lower orders of his time. Pitt bound English hearts together for the protection of British commerce, the increase of British influence. Wilkes set huge new barriers 'twixt the already estranged populace and nobles by showing the former how they were oppressed; by stirring to the surface the evil that was in them.

To make things worse at a critical moment, the harvest of this year had been a poor one. The middle and lower classes were in distress in the matter of provisions. Decent citizens' wives nerved themselves to the ordeal; called and besought the

rich to assist them out of their plenty (for they managed to wring rents out of their tenants somehow) ; and were repulsed with coarse jests if they were comely, with rude insult if they were not. In truth, the fever of gaming was so heavy on persons of quality that they had no money for good works. My Lord Holland received in this world retribution for his sins ; for both his sons became inveterate gamesters, and many a time was the money-grubber ruefully compelled to pull his purse-strings.

Since his Majesty, in disgust at the ingratitude of his subjects, turned Grand Llama, the nobility were forced to cater for their own amusements. The Duchess of Tewkesbury, queen of fashion, was glittering in foreign palaces, and her Grace of Ancaster temporarily took her place. Wearied with the constant grumbling of the rabble, which would make itself heard above the rattle of coach-wheels, she inaugurated a series of ridottos and choice suppers in which all modish persons were called upon to join for the good of trade. It is wonderful how fond, throughout the world's story, people have been of dancing on volcanoes ! The notion was a plausible one no doubt in theory, and kindly meant. My lords and my ladies hastened (for the good of trade) to array themselves in costly masquing habits, and flaunt about in gorgeous chairs clad in the richest Italian velvets and French silks. But they failed to remember that the weavers of

Spitalfields were already exasperated at the importation of foreign goods, complaining that none would purchase the work of British hands. They also forgot that trade could gain little from their junketing, because payment of liabilities was not a recognised duty of the time. They owed long bills; but how could they pay them, when faro and hazard devoured all their cash? So her Grace of Ancaster's device was not altogether crowned with success. People were even rude enough to gnash their teeth at her when she walked out and was seen sweeping her brocade upon the Mall.

Mr. Grenville's awful ceremony was to take place on a certain December day at dawn, and it behoved everybody to see the sentence carried out. No. 45 (that "Bloody Scroll") was to be burnt in front of the Royal Exchange, but in compliance with the terms of a petition the place of execution was changed to Cripplegate. A supper was organised upon a large scale at the favourite modish tavern of the Feathers. All that was most dainty in meats was to be provided "for the good of trade" on credit; the creamiest of social cream was to partake of it. After supper my lords and ladies were to gamble till the sun rose, then, having looked upon the ministerial pageant, were to be carried home to bed. People were bored with Tyburn-hangings. The immolation of a bit of paper was new. A charming programme this, in obedience with which the upper rooms of the

Feathers were gay with light and laughter all through the winter night, while its halls were full of chairs and footmen, and its portals thronged with eager starving wretches. The less fashionable Lamb and Breeches opposite furnished its quota to the crowd. The dark passage leading to the city-walls seethed more busily than usual with human vermin. The cellar below was as full of sinister faces as an egg of meat. A dense mob swayed beneath the shadow of closed Cripplegate.

Lady Gladys and her sister were specially invited to the supper, because Lord Bellasis was to be there, and since the Duchess of Tewkesbury's departure the course of his true love did not run smooth.

What did it mean, he wondered. The ducal widow could not have changed her mind again? Of course not. Though it would be strange if she should elect to marry him *en secondes noces* who was in reality her only husband! Lord Bellasis, looking at himself in the mirror, thought it possible if awkward, for he was quite a pretty fellow—much prettier now than when she married him, and it did not seem impossible that her Grace should have elected of a sudden to be jealous, and to thwart his half-assured success with Lady Gladys now that her old pantaloons of a Duke was taken from her. In such a case, thought my Lord Bellasis, what could be done? He was quite certain now that he did

not love her Grace. Fairest of the fair though she might be, the modest violet was sweeter to him than the lily. A most unpleasant predicament. A night or two ago he went to see the “Beggar’s Opera,” and the sight of Macheath decided him. The Duchess was away. Why not settle the question at once, and marry Lady Gladys before her return? It was most provoking that marriages might no longer be celebrated as easily as of yore. In any case it was expedient gently to lead on the coy maid of honour, who was apparently jibbing, like a timid steed, at her happiness. Lady Gladys declined to attend the party, alleging that it would be improper for a maid of honour of the Princess to seem to be aware of the existence of the *North Briton*. Lord Bellasis was disappointed.

“Women are demons!” he cried. “It behoves a man to love himself and nobody else, who would not lose his self-respect.”

He settled his chin into his black military stock, and strode frowning to the Feathers with his prim military strut, determined to take to gambling—anything—to show his contempt for the sex.

What a festive gathering it was! How grateful should have been the scum for such lavish expenditure (on credit). There was a professional mother of seven Delias from the Drury Lane ballet, fancifully attired as an abbess with seven nuns. There were some lively officers in their red jackets with a

tiny triangle of white collar turned over their silk stocks. There was her Grace of Ancaster in her celebrated boy's dress, her satin hat battered, her curly wig awry, an interregnum of charming leg visible between knee-buckle and wrinkled stocking. In fact there was all that was most modish, and most creamy, and least virtuous. Miss Ashe, hoarse, and painted, and horribly leering, told indecent stories with delicious piquancy. Lady Caroline Petersham swore by her gizzard, in tones thickened by many moistened revels, that the common sailor hanged yesterday at Execution Dock was a stalwart knave quite after her own heart.

Some of the party grew uproariously drunk and slept, the remainder sat themselves down with becoming sobriety to play. Lord Bellasis was one of these, who, with Lord Holland's beardless boys, set to work with the ceremonious politeness of acknowledged pretty fellows. They divested each other, with bows and toe-scrapings, of their broidered garments, donning frieze coats turned inside-out for luck. They assumed leathern gauntlets to protect their lace ruffles, and wide-brimmed straw-hats to prevent tumbling their built-up hair. Each player had beside him a huge dish of tea and a wooden bowl to hold *rouleaux*. Some five thousand pounds in specie was tossed upon the table. And so the party remained during the hours of night; some playing masked to conceal their emotions;

some snorting beneath the table, struggling now and then to their feet to cure the parching of their throats with drink, or guzzle a scrap of pie. The silence was only broken by snores, and dream-babble, and the hissing of candles which were being snuffed, varied by a good round oath now and then, or a muttered execration.

In a little room on the same floor sat beside a table, well-garnished with wine and victuals, no less a personage than Colonel Wilkes. Yes. The author of Grenville's trouble, and of the King's uneasiness, thought it quite a pleasurable excitement to come and see his own paper burnt, his own printer pilloried, from the windows of the very room which he often occupied whilst writing. He was in the best of spirits, as he chatted gaily with Mr. Meadows; for silly Grenville was playing into his hands delightfully. Not a trap was set but he walked upon it; not a pitfall dug but he flounced into it headlong.

“Ministers won’t employ me,” he had said after being repulsed by three premiers in turn. “If they won’t find work for me, I’ll find work for them!”

And so Colonel Wilkes sat listening to the carousing and cursing in the next room as he looked upon the populace below, and felt pleasantly like Nero who fiddled whilst Rome was burning.

The massive doors of Cripplegate were shut for

the night, and closed the narrow street with a dense dark barrier. The ponderous signs of the Feathers, and Lamb and Breeches swung in the wintry wind. Knots of men and women danced round impromptu bonfires to keep their blood from freezing, shaking their fists now and again at the uncurtained windows of the Feathers, as they crooned the last broadside anent the petticoat and boot. They were come to see the ceremony just as an idle mob will always run to look on anything novel. Colonel Wilkes wondered whether it would be permitted to proceed undisturbed. He had worked hard to rouse the people. Would they rise in earnest now or be content with growling? Since the demagogue had opened their eyes to their condition there was no doubt that the mob waxed more dangerous daily. Poor and rich lived so close together that the former could not but be hourly affronted by an incautious display of extreme magnificence. Soho and Bloomsbury were the fashionable quarters, which were like islands of opulence surrounded by a sea of starvation. Bordering the straggling fields that lay between the inhabited spots and supplied convenient lurking-places, were many empty houses, abandoned and rickety, to which destitute creatures crawled; and whence they could study the advantages of money while shivering in their dens. Hosts of pariahs, whose first crime was penury—living pictures of filth and hunger—gathered each night

in these deserted houses to prowl forth by day like wolves ; men and women hardened by constant contemplation of death, starvation, murder ; human waifs and strays ready for anything, who had all to gain and naught to lose.

Many of these were out to-night, Colonel Wilkes observed. The vulture smells carrion from afar. No. It did not seem likely that the burning would pass over undisturbed. These waifs and strays, if organised under paid leaders, would be a powerful weapon. Stone (who was not present on this occasion) was a shrewd fellow for having thought of it. He was even now deep in consultation with sundry Jews who were prepared to speculate as to the eventual ownership of the Tewkesbury estates. There was a prospect of money being speedily forthcoming. Wilkes turned to his dear friend Meadows with his most taking squint, displayed his whole mouthful of black teeth, and roused that lymphatic person from dozing by well-chosen quips and jests.

The bar-room of the Lamb and Breeches opposite was bright with many a tallow candle. Sim Ames was there and all the gang (in livery now as my Lord Bute's servitors). Hosts of footmen were there too, haughtily reviling "Wilkes and Liberty" as absurd, for they thought themselves quite one with the aristocracy. Chairmen were there in numbers, who growled, as taking off their wigs they mopped

their shaven pates; they, being mostly Irishmen, looked forward to a row, and would not be sorry, moreover, of the opportunity of clouting their insolent fellow-servants, the pampered footmen. Then there were hosts of out-at-elbowed, rubicund gentlemen, attired in rustiest black, who also glowered at the footmen. These were wretched ex-Fleet parsons, who fervently took up the popular side with a faint hope that topsy-turvydom might bring with it the glorious bygone days of secret marriages. Then from the cellar below came many a roistering stave and shout as the petticoat-pensioners, bloods, cut-throat captains, and the rest, drank with three times three the toast of “Wilkes and Liberty.” Had Grenville been there to gauge this motley crew, drawn together as it seemed by some occult influence of mischief, even he, bat as he was, might have been frightened, and have postponed his ceremony *sine die*. But he was away at his country-house, discoursing to a circle of admiring friends, over a few bottles of prime port, about the advantages of a firm hand and a clear intellect. If he was not present Wilkes was, and the clever Colonel was more than satisfied.

There was a sudden rush and outcry in the street. Already! Why it was barely four o’clock. The pillory had not yet arrived, nor the hangman, nor No. 45. An outcry and a rush, followed by applause and peals of laughter—Sim went out to reconnoitre.

The upper windows of the Feathers were open to their widest, all save the Patriot's, whose blinds were closely drawn. At the windows stood Lord Holland's madcap sons, who, together with the nuns from Drury Lane and the officers, were pelting the crowd with scraps of delicacies—legs of capons, dainty pies, costly fruits—shrieking the while and whooping like so many bejewelled drunken devils. With a howl and spring like a rush of wolves, the starving wretches fell upon the food, tearing bones half gnawed from between each other's lips and shreds of meat foul with the mire of the road. Stretching over the heads of the young men, her Grace of Ancaster playfully tossed out a half-consumed flask of Burgundy which was caught eagerly and emptied in a trice, while a hundred ravenous fingers clawed the air for more. Then the young men in their jocund humour threw bottles out by dozens, some of which fell bursting on the stones, while others split upon upturned faces with ugly cuts and gashes. The hungry creatures ate and drank and cursed the hands that fed them thus as if they had been brutes ; the officers began to employ empty flasks as playful missiles ; crowns were broken ; the madcap Foxes gibed and gibbered to provoke the crowd to rage which surged and lashed only a few feet beneath them. Wilkes from behind his curtain rubbed his hands, murmuring, “ How the fools play with fire ! ” while Meadows slumbered. Vainly

Lord Bellasis, foreseeing danger, left his cards to implore his comrades to hear reason. They would not leave the windows, neither would they forego the pleasure of hurling empty bottles. The Drury Lane damsels screamed with delight, so did raddled Miss Ashe. What fun ! There was an old man below mopping his sconce which streamed with blood. Heave another bottle at him to distract his thoughts ! Things really were looking serious when a rumble was heard approaching, and the attention of all was turned to a coming cart.

The pillory ! the pillory ! With a speed born of habit a couple of men leaped down and deftly set up a stage some three feet high, from which rose a post with a board across the top in which were three round holes. The stains upon the board—marks of mud and filth and gore—showed that it had done good service. The pillory during these years was very much in use as a means of coercing obstreperous lieges, accompanied sometimes with ear-cropping and nostril-slitting or branding with an iron. The mob indeed would just at this time resent a show unaccompanied by such exciting details as unworthy of their notice. A gentleman named Egan was killed with a stone in 1751 by an indignant spectator, who considered the mere nailing of his ear to a bit of wood as trifling with the sacred rights of a critical audience. The pillory was ready, so was a great heap of firewood with a gallows

rising from its midst. Where were Jack Ketch and his two victims?

“He is a lazy dolt!” grumbled an old woman in a round hat and ragged mantle.

“Maybe he’s tired,” returned her gossip with feeling. “He scragged a dozen men and two women yesterday at Tyburn. Warm work, and a man’s arm is not made of iron. Four were to be hung in chains too afterwards, but there was not time. He’ll have another ’prentice or two if this goes on, I warrant.”

Time passed. The aristocratic occupants of the Feathers, weary of baiting the mob, were gone back to dice. The chill of dawn crept over all. Her Grace of Ancaster, wrapped in a fur cloak, lay asleep with her feet muffled in a military roquelaure. A cry arose of “They’re coming!” Men elbowed their way to a front place, women stood clucking on tiptoe. There was a momentary hush of interest as Jack Ketch, a dirty, sodden little man with a wizened face framed by a nightcap-wig, drove up in a whisky with another man half-fainting by his side. The printer! Poor fellow! Every one was sorry for him, for after all he was to be punished for having printed the paper which it amused them all to read. Groaning he took his place on the scaffold; his head and hands appeared through the three holes; abject tears coursed down his face. His terror was premature, for no one cast a missile

at him. Jack Ketch sat grinning at his feet, with arms crossed and a pipe between his teeth. His daily duties were so ghastly that this pageant seemed to him the paltriest joke. An hour passed. He roused himself; for now the fire must be lit which was to heat the brand for the printer's cheek and consume the other victim—hapless 45—the “Bloody Scroll,” as Grenville chose to call it. Gravely he drew a paper from his pocket, unfurled it with a jerk, tied it to the little doll's gallows, and blew the wood into a flame. The mob were undecided how to act, for, while they appreciated the absurdity of the doll's gallows, they knew well the use of the iron in the hangman's hand, and were tempted to prevent its being employed. The printer too knew what it was for. His lamentations recommenced—he howled like a pig under the knife. The wood was dry; it crackled and sent up showers of sparks. The paper fluttered in the morning wind; the flame licked nearer—nearer. People looked one at another. Was this foolish mummary to proceed unchecked? Was the popular caterer of scandal to be so insulted? The crowd, still undecided, wavered; and it is possible that Wilkes might have been disappointed in his hopes, had not a tall man, cadaverous and hollow-eyed, risen like a spectre from their midst with a soldier's salute to the window which was shielded by drawn blinds.

“ So dies liberty of thought,” he said in a clear voice. “ So do we perish under the yoke of a tyrant whose foot is hard upon our necks.”

Wilkes peered between the curtain-chinks and knew the face. A singular and unexpected ally this, with so wobegone a countenance as surely not even the tragic art of my Lord Bute could equal—lineaments worn by pain and suffering and sorrow into unseemly furrows. A face chiselled in noble lines from which the god-like stamp was almost vanished. A fine face, lit by eyes that should have shone softly under their lashes, but which instead were illumined by despair.

“ Odd,” Colonel Wilkes murmured, “ that this fellow should turn up trumps. Where are the paid gentry? Not to the front, I suppose, till Stone can finance the money.”

Unconscious Meadows, the innocent money-bag, slept peacefully. Sim Ames, unutterably wretched, torn as he was by conflicting interests, smoked a moody clay within the Lamb and Breeches. Verily the turn of affairs was sufficiently kaleidoscopic to twist awry steadier brains than his. Who was going to win? The lowering mob was fierce but craven. The nobles, drunk with conceit and liquor, were sheltered by the prestige of the past, which yet clung about their order. Would they go too far? Would this scum, maddened by never-ending wrong, assume at last enough courage to break

down a phantom barrier? Who might safely decide this knotty question? Verily it was an exasperating position for a time-server. Glancing through the blurred panes of the bar-parlour, he beheld a ghost, and dropped his pipe, which shivered on the floor. The ghostly Jasper! Paler, thinner, the bronze of his skin faded to parchment hue. Was this his wraith, or might it be really Jasper?—brave Jasper—Scratchpole—a few weeks back the terror of the road! Why not? A few weeks with Bambridge—what might they not accomplish? With a remorseful pang Sim rose to his feet. All those ages ago did not the friendship of the twain spring from his own compassion for the tortured Jacobite? Did not this friendship endure through eventful years marked by many a stone of skirmish and of danger, to vanish apparently in a paltry jealous tiff? How wrong, how mean, not to have had a hand in his escape. His escape! It was a miracle. Sim knew in his heart that he had never expected to see his chief again, save perhaps at Tyburn, and was indistinctly aware that, unlike Blake, surnamed Blueskin, he was in nowise prepared to risk his neck for a merely romantic love of any friend whatever. When the prison-door has slammed on an old pal for good it is possible to shut him from the memory, but when he miraculously reappears in the world again, even so selfish a being as Sim Ames will feel a twinge of compunc-

tion. Jasper had been dead and was alive again—was returned to complicate matters already too much knotted. Which side in the looming contest would Bambridge's victim take? And would his choice be the wisest one? Jasper was a clever fellow. Would it be well, forgetting old scores, to follow his lead again? What greater torment can there be for a gentleman whose god is self than to see his interest shaking in the balance against a something which may prove lead or feathers? With a movement of self-contempt which was unusual to him, Sim banged open the bar-door and strode towards the fire.

“A fine scaffold,” he scoffed. “I like to study scaffolds, for which amongst us may not expect to swing on one? Is it a pulpit for a parson?”

“No; a block for Liberty!” retorted the gaunt man with a sneer.

“Jasper!” Sim said.

“Yes, Jasper—snatched from the jaws of death—no thanks to you.”

“I could not help it,” returned Sim sulkily. “How did you get out?”

“Never mind how. Yesterday I left the Fleet, and have wandered ever since like a doomed soul. Deborah! whither hath she fled? I cannot find her, and her Grace relied on me in her absence. I traced her to Tewkesbury House, but there the clue was broken. The old porter could not speak at first,

so shocked was he at my appearance. My appearance —ha! ha! The strong-room, and the skull-cap, and the helm, do not bring out the beauty in a man !” Jasper was speaking low and rapidly, more to himself than to his companion, who shivered at his strange laughter. Turning fiercely upon him, he continued: “ You know something of this. The description of the man who spirited her away was yours. Stone was with you—her Grace’s bitterest foe. You are planning something against my sister in her absence—you who used to call yourself my friend. For shame ! You never stirred a finger to help me in my trouble. Yet will I forgive you all if only you will say where the woman is stowed.”

In his anxiety Jasper forgot that no words concerning Deborah’s secret had ever passed between himself and her step-son, and that he might be placing an unknown weapon in the enemy’s hand. Wandering as he had lately wandered, during an afternoon and night, between Highgate and Bloomsbury, every sort of wild scheme passed through his mind. The broad shoulders, snub-nose, and peculiar wig described by the porter could surely belong to none but Sim ; yet he could not believe in that person’s treachery to himself, albeit he knew of his heartlessness to others, until the ancient servitor clinched the matter by remarking that the man of whom he spoke was the same who sometimes visited Master Jasper in his lodgings near

the stables. Sim and Stone together. Sim and his step-mother rumbling away in a coach while Stone stood smiling. Something was brewing which boded no good to her careless Grace. What?

Jasper passed through a new phase during his confinement in the strong-room. His altered face was but the mirror of his mind. If you have watched him you will remember that his sensitively attuned nature received its first jar when he fell into the clutches of Bambridge after Culloden. Then it was that he resolved upon his petty war against the world. The death of the old Duke's innocent serving-man by his hand at Fulham wrought another change—one for the better—which was strengthened by the example of Wolfe and Washington in America. Returned to England, the blossom of good which with fostering care might have ripened into fruit, was blighted—to put forth fresh shoots when for the second time he resolved to amend his ways for his sister's sake. Then came the final blow. Consigned again to Bambridge, that fiend amused himself by venting all his pent-up rage upon the son of her who had once flouted him. The shears, the skull-cap, the thumbscrew were all brought into requisition for his behoof. He lay in a noisome dungeon with the dead. Even this was not enough. Bambridge and Corbett, in a frolicsome mood, declared one morning that he should be *pressed*, and Jasper felt glad, for many died under the ordeal.

Now the punishment of pressing was reserved for those prisoners only who refused to plead to their indictment—a barbarous punishment worthy of this barbarous time from which we are just emerging. The last man pressed *by authority* was one Spiggot, in 1721. Yet the law was not changed till this year of grace 1771 (in which I write) altered by the instrumentality of Jasper, who returned from the colonies for that purpose.

But we must not move too fast. Bambridge, in sport, declared that he should be pressed, and organised among the prisoners a court and jury, gagging his victim playfully *that he might be mute* when called upon to plead. The prisoners, poor broken-spirited wretches, fawning on their tyrant, entered into the joke, though some fainted when they beheld the nude figure of the highwayman on its back upon the floor, with feet and hands stretched by ropes towards the four corners of the chamber. A gaoler, to curry favour with his chief, read the legal sentence from a book. “If the prisoner refuse to plead, then shall be laid upon his body as much stone and iron as he can bear, *and more.*”

Jasper endured the punishment for many hours, and lay for days afterwards almost unconscious. Then, through the ruse of grateful Meadows, he was suddenly brought before a real court, acquitted for want of evidence and set free—an altered man,

embittered now beyond repair, in whose darkened nature remained but one tiny speck of white. He would see his sister safely out of danger. That done, Scratchpole would start again—pitiless now—a cross of fire. If at last he chanced to swing, his hands should be well stained with blood; he would die scornfully, gleefully, with curses on his lips.

In this mood, rendered yet more bitter by the relentlessness of fate in the matter of Deborah, he found himself in the midst of a surging mob, of which each atom smarted with its own wrong, contemplating Mr. Grenville's awful pageant and grinning Jack Ketch. Sim came upon him unexpectedly (the man in whom he was beginning to see an enemy), and he stooped to implore his quondam ally, who, though selfishness incarnate, was not proof against his entreaties.

“I cannot help it, lad!” cried that worthy with an oath. “I’m paid to keep the secret, but you shall even have it. My blessed step-mother is at Sot’s Hole. There! If you had but gone to see old friends you would have found her there yourself, and so saved my conscience—my conscience—ha! ha! Stone is your foe. Beware of him! He is determined to keep the Duchess in ignorance of his bombs until they are ready to burst. For that purpose he sent me with the gang to intercept the mails last night, having an idea that there were letters for her Grace. He was mistaken though.

Well! Don't look so black. I was well paid for that job, and, as it happened, it did her no harm."

"Keep her away, will he?" sneered Jasper. "This is some legal quill-splitting. Fool! She is posting homewards now. Her coach lies at Dover waiting for her yacht."

The hurried conversation ended; for the iron was by this time hot, the hapless printer shrieked for mercy, the flames were licking up into dangerous proximity with No. 45. A murmur passed like a wave over the throng as Jack Ketch clambered on to the scaffold with his iron—a brand which he applied hissing to the printer's cheek. King Mob was accustomed to make merry over the woes of criminals, but two such criminals as these had never been seen before. A paper, which all read weekly with avidity, and the man who gained his bread by setting up in type the principles which they admired. The printer gave a piercing scream as L.S. stood in livid marks upon his flesh, and he was struggling desperately to save his other cheek, when quickly a man sprang upon the platform, tossed the iron whizzing over the people's heads, and hurled the hangman from the scaffold to the ground, where he lay insensible. For a second the mob was paralysed; then, with a howl, men and women rushed roaring upon the pillory, tore it asunder, and set the prisoner free. They had committed themselves now. My lords and ladies at the upper windows

stood aghast. Miss Ashe turned blue under her paint. The Duchess of Ancaster looked grave, and loosened her toy rapier in its sheath, measuring with pinched lips the sea of heads which swayed betwixt herself and safety.

“Hell is breaking loose—we must save the ladies!” muttered Lord Bellasis, closing down the windows. Hastily the gentlemen drew their swords, and prepared to battle a way out. What would be the best plan? The road leading to the fashionable quarter was blocked. Cripplegate stood open (it swung on its hinges daily at sunrise and sunset); a few yards without the gates there was a small barrack occupied by a train-band party. It would be best for some one to creep forth and alarm them. How foolish of Mr. Grenville not to have provided for the keeping of the peace! The people had borne so much of late with a mere growl, that no one thought that they might take to biting.

The rescued printer fainted, and was borne within the Lamb and Breeches. A hundred feet kicked out the fire, a hundred voices yelled in chorus,

“Oho! how the country would roar and would hoot,
If it once set a-hanging my Lord John of Bute!”

Men seized portions of the pillory and brandished them as weapons. Women danced round in swiftly swirling circles, shaking threatening fists at the group above.

“A groan for Bute! A groan for his puppy-

dog ! Three times three for Wilkes and Liberty ! Huzza, boys ! " a little man screamed out of a garret-window. " Who sold his country for a bribe to France ? Bute ! Who keeps his King under lock and key ? Bute ! Who hath made Royalty ridiculous ? John, Earl of Bute ! "

A howl of execration followed this sally. Fragments of glass, of dirt, and stones fell in showers on the windows of the Feathers, smashing them to splinters. Miss Ashe in tears implored the dear darling people to be quiet.

" Give us a petticoat," a burly fellow retorted, " and none shall harm you. A petticoat ! A petticoat ! "

Myriad hands were stretched forth to receive it—stones, bricks, bottles, shattered pieces of chairs flew in menacing hail.

" For the Lord's sake, give them your petticoat ! " whispered her Grace of Ancaster. " Anything to gain time. How long they are ! "

With renewed weeping and ejaculations poor Miss Ashe took off her broidered petticoat and flung it out. A ringing cheer ! A boot now. A boot ! a boot ! The host of bloods, Irish captains, bullies, and the rest, who were accustomed to spend their nights in the Lamb and Breeches cellar, were swarming up like rats from holes. The vermin who crouched in the dark passages showed their sodden skins to the young sun, the whole black flight of Fleet parsons sallied forth like a shoal of beetles,

for something was in the wind which might bring manna to their empty mouths.

Jasper detached No. 45 from the doll's gallows, and, setting it on a pole, himself shouldered the new standard of Liberty. Miss Ashe beheld her best petticoat tied to a boot and marched with mock solemnity round the fire, which a party of women had scraped together and rekindled. Round and round the procession moved, singing and dancing like mad dervishes, then with a great yell the torn symbols were tossed into the flames, and each man shouted a curse on my Lord Bute, the Princess, and Mr. Grenville. Her Grace of Ancaster began to look less grave. If the mob were content with such childish mischief, there was no real danger. An officer, choosing his time when the eyes of all were turned upon the new sacrifice, had slunk out and made for the train-band quarters. Eagerly the ladies scanned the road. If only the petticoat would occupy this rabble till succour should come ! But Jasper, turning from the smouldering symbols, beheld the cloud of dust approaching, the glinting of red uniforms, as speedily as did the ladies.

“ Soldiers !” he shouted. The mob paused and wavered, uncertain how to act. “ Bar the gates, quick !” ordered Jasper. “ If ye desert your own cause ye deserve to be slaves ! Wilkes and Liberty ! Huzza !”

The sheep had found a shepherd. Like an ad-

vancing flood they billowed against the gates and closed them fast. Vainly the soldiers battered. The position of the ladies was critical again, and Miss Ashe howled.

A pallid fellow, well-nigh as pale as Jasper, clapped him on the back.

“Take this man for your chief, my masters,” he cried. “For he is resolute, and God knows we need redress! Woe to the rich who wanton whilst we starve! We must teach them a hard lesson—to correct their evil ways and arrange the products of the earth to answer the true ends of life.”

“Who are you, friend?” Jasper asked.

“A suffering man—such as by your face I see you to be. I am a weaver. My wife lies half dead at home through hunger. My only child died last night. Give me thy hand.”

The two men shook hands—and the weaver, pointing at the Feathers, bade the mob come on and sack it. Lord Bellasis, followed by the officers, barred their way with naked blades.

“Jasper! How now!” cried my lord. “What madness is this? You saved my life, let me save yours. Drop that accursed newspaper; help me to restore order, and I will guarantee that no notice is taken of this freak.”

“It is no freak,” returned the highwayman doggedly. “I have escaped by miracle from the earthly hell that’s in our midst—where the innocent

suffer the tortures of the damned. That hell shall exist no more. Friends!" he shouted, turning to the crowd, "I have but just escaped from the Fleet prison—where untried I was subjected to the press. Shall such things be? Remember the man of Lewes, who, because he was dumb and could not plead, was crushed to death there with a weight of four hundred pounds upon his chest. For five hours he endured his pain, till a gaoler more merciful than the law added his own weight and slew him in pity! Rouse yourselves, if ye be men. Say, shall these things be?"

The speaker was answered by a yell.

"Jasper, you are mad! Reflect!" urged Lord Bellasis. "We will defend these ladies with our lives. You are stirring the embers of rebellion!"

"Too late!" returned Jasper. "The blood of the oppressed cries loud for vengeance. The ladies shall not be harmed if I can help it. I am striving to divert the flood elsewhere. Wilkes and Liberty!"

"For liberty read bludgeon," murmured my lord, turning up the cuff of his sword-hand.

Wilkes, meanwhile, had been watching the progress of events through a curtain-chink. That closing of the gates was cleverly imagined. The soldiers were gone round to enter by another gate. If taken in flank the rabble would certainly be routed. The murder of a live duchess, too, by a mob

would ruin his cause at starting. It was of the first importance to remove their new-born energies to another sphere. With fine theatrical effect he flung aside his curtain, threw open the window, and stood bowing—the ugly idol which the good people of London had set up. A murmur passed over the crowd at sight of him, followed by expectant silence.

“Good friends!” he said in clear musical accents only inferior in quality to those of Mr. Pitt, “it is a sad mistake which brings us here this morning, for we have come to gaze upon the funeral pyre of our liberties. That paper, which it pleases ministers to burn, is full of respectful duty to our King, though it arraigns in severest measure the grievous sins of government. It is the peculiar crime of our day for ministers and favourites to fling odium from off themselves upon Majesty. This pageant, I perceive, is merely the commencement of a persecution which may bear me down. Come what may, I shall remain dutiful to the Prince who wears the crown and do my duty to you—my countrymen and brothers!”

The mob were bursting into a great cheer, when, by a wave of his white hand, the Colonel reduced them again to silence.

“Men of London,” he said, “ye are the fountains of power. Unite for the deliverance of your groaning country! For the King on the throne, for the

laws by which king and subjects are reciprocally bound, for the rights and privileges which God requires you to transmit intact to your posterity—*now*, in this alarming crisis maintain calmly, nobly, the authority of the PEOPLE! Protect your King against his ministers, against the invisible, irresponsible, pernicious influence of a corrupt favourite; for that intangible phantom behind the throne overshadows the King himself! Go to him all of you who have just grievances—respectfully and humbly, but also firmly; kneel before him claiming their redress. By interrupting the shameful exhibition of this morning your hearts have guided you aright. Go and do better still. Begone! Farewell!"

Closing his casement the artful demagogue vanished. By a few words he had saved the court ladies, tickled the mob's vanity, roused their passions, and indulged in flowery loyalty with regard to his royal master. He had moreover inflamed the aggrieved weaver to the extremest pitch, who, in a delusive hope of righting wrong by violence, rushed off bawling, "To St. James's!" pursued by all that was unruly in the neighbourhood. Jasper rushed off too, waving his impromptu banner, bent in the bitterness of his spirit upon making the impending riot serve his own ends. He was resolved to gather together the scum of the city, the halt, the lame, the broken, and to make of them the instruments of retribution. As Bishop

Hatto on the Rhine was gnawed to death by rats, so should Bambridge be by those very reptiles who had become such through him. How the wretch would tremble when he beheld the noisome army coming ! He would blench as blenched Macbeth at sight of Dunsinane Wood. To see him wrenched limb from limb before his eyes was what Jasper promised himself. But on his way he paused. For the moment he had forgot his sister. Sim had warned him that danger was brewing for her. First Deborah must be secured, as she happened to be the centre of the misty plot. Then it would be time to see after Bambridge.

Meanwhile Sim had eagerly watched the temper of the mob. They were fierce ; they were easily led —but unstable. It would be rash as yet to commit himself irretrievably to either side. It was foolish to have told Jasper about Deborah. Yet why so ? Unexpectedly set free, there was nothing to prevent his discovery of her retreat. If he were loyal to Stone he ought no doubt to take instant measures to ensure the safety of Stone's prize. But he was not loyal, being unusually remorseful for the moment with regard to Jasper. Yet why should he love Jasper after all ? That doughty Captain was extremely rude to him sometimes. It would be pleasanter to rule the gang alone. He had salved his conscience on the one hand by telling Jasper about Deborah. He would now do so on the other

by bearing to the ex-tutor a piece of information let drop by accident. Perhaps it might be useful. At all events it would look zealous. The Duchess was returning—might be expected at any moment. Her carriage was awaiting at Dover the arrival of her yacht. Now Stone was specially anxious that her Grace should remain abroad. No doubt the information was worth carrying. The mettle of the mob must be proved before joining their ranks. In any case Wilkes was like a cork upon the waters. Safe himself, his intention was to terrify government into bribing him. Riots are so good for collectors! At the worst, it would be easy to slip across the water and hibernate in Holland till such dangers were over as seemed possibly to threaten him. So Sim sauntered away, rejoicing in the crisp morning air and exhilarating frost, in the direction of the handsome lodgings occupied by ex-tutor Andrew Stone.



CHAPTER VI.

HANNAH EXERTS HERSELF.

HE rioters marched in noisy phalanx to St. James's, in obedience to the mandate of Colonel Wilkes—the clever Colonel, who, knowing that the King was not there, was merely putting his recruits through their paces. His Majesty the Grand Llama was studying plants at Kew, and wist not of the danger which menaced London. He sought calm in his suburban retreat, and found it among his flowers, by the side of the ugly duckling who was matriculating for a swan. When Lord Bute rode over thither with news, he sighed fretfully, for was it not enough to endure the hectoring of the bat Grenville twice a week without Lord Bute's budget of court scandal superadded?

But my lord arrived one day as important and fussy as in the old times, and the King looked up

with a faint gleam of interest. What had happened now? Was Bedlam broken loose, or had Wilkes turned loyalist? Or was it perhaps that my lords and ladies were turned virtuous? The favourite shook his head solemnly and turned up his eyes, and was too much shocked to speak. Something had happened which was more wonderful than any of these things—more dreadful than a breaking out of Bedlam, more dangerous to the order of the noblesse than any lies of Wilkes's. A formal demand had been laid before Mr. Grenville in the name of the heir-at-law to the late Duke of Tewkesbury for a criminal trial of her Grace on a charge of bigamy.

The King, aghast, dropped his watering-pot; the Queen remarked complacently that she had always thought that woman capable of anything. Lord Bute himself could not get over the shock at all; for he held that the nobles of the land possessed special privileges, that vices in them were no more than foibles, that whilst a common man was justly hanged for appropriating a radish, it was a mark of ill-breeding in a tailor to ask a lord to pay his debts. And these common people, who under Wilkes's generalship had already so misbehaved themselves; what would they think and say if a duchess were held up to public obloquy? That one of the blue-blooded should appear in the dock was a wrench to all his prejudices. He lamented loudly when, a few years

before, Earl Ferrers was hanged like a highwayman for murdering his steward. But this was infinitely worse. The Première Duchesse, the queen of fashion, the friend of the Princess Dowager, standing in the dock ! What an injurious lesson for the many-headed, who might be brought to the conclusion that a duchess is not of necessity a miracle of excellence. In talking the matter over with the King, he urged that by any means such a scandal must be hushed up ; that his Majesty must use his prerogative and nip it in the bud ; but to his horror and surprise his Majesty was obstinate. He was even pigheaded, if so opprobrious an epithet may ever be applied to so great a Bashaw. He would not—no, he could not—ever forgive her Grace or Mr. Pitt for their share in the tooth-drawing. A court scandal of such huge dimensions was terrible no doubt. But if the charge were true that the fair one had been greedy in the matter of husbands, why, the law should take its course. My Lord Bute pointed out that such a case was without precedent. Who was to try the delinquent ? Where was she to be tried ? Was she to go to Tyburn like Lord Ferrers ? His Majesty must be dreaming to take the matter so coolly. At all events the question must not be so hastily decided. To all that my Lord Bute had to say the King answered nothing, but with lips doggedly pressed together pursued his watering in silence.

Lord Bute returned to town; or rather to the Hercules' Pillars at Hyde Park Corner, where it became expedient for him to resume the hateful red wig and conspirator's cloak, in which popular execration compelled him to robe himself. He slunk across the park to the Princess Dowager's, who regaled him over a dish of tea with an account of Mr. Grenville's pageant. Things were certainly beginning to look very serious. It would never do to throw light on any of the wild Duchess's vagaries just at present. And such a charge too as this one was! She never could have been such an idiot as to marry two people at a time when it was quite common to forget such a detail as a marriage ceremony altogether. This must surely be some trumped-up mischief of Wilkes's, which her Grace could refute instantly if she were only back in England. Oh, this Wilkes, this Wilkes! Would no one put him out of the way? This dreadful thorn in the flesh which was tearing everybody's skin to tatters? On all sides things did look very black. Would her Highness be so good as to pour out another dish of tea?

When the mob found that their King was not at St. James's, they marched into Spital Fields and took grave counsel there. All the idlers on the way followed them thither, to whom the weaver, who had so distinguished himself at Cripplegate, retailed with embellishments the Colonel's harangue anent

the rights and authority of the people. He urged each trade to form itself into a battalion, and stand boldly out for a redress of grievances. Now was the time, or never. The proposition was answered by a shout of approval. The brethren of his craft rallied round him, whilst members of other trades sought leaders from amongst themselves; all of them agreeing to adopt as a cognizance the martyrised number 45; as a war-cry “Wilkes and Liberty.”

All day threatening bands paraded the streets, hustling women, forcing occupants of chairs to get out and bow to the name of Wilkes, gathering in menacing knots about the doors of mercers who dealt in foreign fabrics. Many closed their shops in haste through dread of violence. But the mob had not yet learnt their strength, and were content so far with issuing orders for a general illumination in honour of their victory over Mr. Grenville. It was a dismal, wintry, slate-coloured day. The rioters sent forth detachments to impound rails and palings and such timber as was available; for they had sworn a solemn oath by common consent to sleep under no roof but heaven till their grievances were set straight, and were shrewd enough to know that many a night must be spent by the bonfires in St. George's and Spital Fields ere the result they desired could be attained. Wilkes was delighted. His *North Briton* seemed to have done its work at last.

The many-headed were roused in earnest. A few paid captains to organise and govern the recruits, and his object would be speedily achieved.

The dismal slate-coloured day deepened into slate-coloured twilight. If London shivered as leaves shiver before an approaching storm, how much more wretched looked Rosemary Mead ! Its sedges and brambles glistened with rime ; the black river looked bituminous as it greasily slid by ; a dank mist covered the earth, refusing to be dissipated by the bluster of the wind. Scarce a barge was moving on the waters. Those who should be steering them were away talking politics ashore. The clink of horses' hoofs echoed not along the bridle-path to Fulham, for the collectors who usually patronised Sot's Hole were busily engaged in town. The latest additions to the gaunt gibbet clanked drearily. An occasional fitful moan issued from out the mimic Fleet. Sot's Hole was still and desolate.

Outwardly that shambling hostelry was little altered. The sodden planks still led across the ooze from the river to the door. The heavy eave still darkened the interior, the tenement behind still showed its incongruous sides made up of scarred shutters and perished window-frames. Not so within. The inner room was fitted now with a neat furnace, a vice or so, and instruments for smelting. A practised eye might have detected, too, a mark

upon the floor in a corner under piled sacks—a mark as of boards unnailed which are frequently removed—the mark where the trap opened which communicated with the river. There was no attempt at concealing these arrangements, for none penetrated to the mad-woman's gruesome abode save those who went on business; bargemen for a draught of ale in the outer room, Mr. Ketch and his assistants when new specimens of dead malefactors were brought to hang in chains; and the gentlemen for whose behoof the new arrangements had been made.

Two women sat beside the fire as twilight deepened on this dark December day. The elder of the two rose after rocking herself to and fro for a long space, and tucking back her rough grey hair, drew the shabby curtain across the window.

“A strange light in the heavens!” she mumbled.
“Can London be on fire?”

Then she returned to her place and commenced rocking again, staring the while at her companion wolfishly. Madam Deborah sat opposite on a low stool, immersed in thought; her chin resting on her hand. The parson's widow did not look happy. Indeed there was little left of the assurance of the smug city madam who came hither in boiling rage with Sim Ames a week or two ago. She sat quiet, unheedful of old Hannah's babble, until a prolonged wail from the mimic Fleet caused her to start and

shudder. Old Hannah was as usual mumbling over her wrongs and relating scraps of dread experiences which turned the blood of Deborah to ice.

“Oh! let me go from this horrible spot!” implored the latter. “If I stay here I shall soon be as mad as you. Why did I trust myself with that vagabond who was certain to illtreat his poor step-mother? Let me go, and I’ll do anything. To think that my mistress, who is such a pretty creature, should leave me in this mess! And I, who would have gone on my bare bones for her. What a world it is of serpents’ teeth! What would poor dear Ames say if he could see his Dobby now? Better myself indeed! Better far to be in the servants’ hall again. Why mayn’t I go? Mr. Stone may trust me. I will swear to all he spoke to me about. I will do anything if you will only let me go.”

Hannah rocked on and nodded at long intervals, like a dreadful janitor of clockwork.

“I will not stay,” announced the widow at last, rising with a show of resolution. But she sank down again and sobbed piteously, for her resolve was met by a peal of eldritch laughter. “I am a prisoner here! What have I done; what have I done? Let me go, and I will do anything.”

She clung to old Hannah’s skirts in supplication. As well have clutched the topknot of old Time!

For Hannah's humour jumped with the idea of turning jaileress. Animals in tortured durance were all very well as symbols of what her warped nature would do if it could. But a human prisoner was such a delightful possession as she never dared to hope for, and was not to be idly given up. She might not play at being a female Bambridge to starve or beat Sim's step-mother. Of that she had a glimmer. But there are other, defter ways of torment.

"A prisoner! Of course you are!" croaked the derisive crone. "Come! weep not. I would do much to make you gay. I will take and show you *my* prison—my Fleet—which no human being save myself has ever seen. There's Bambridge there and Corbett—and—and Lord Gowering's daughter," she added in a low voice. "Lord Gowering's daughter! Dying by inches—all!"

"Lord Gowering's daughter—her Grace my mistress!" ejaculated Deborah in astonishment. "What can you know of her? What injury did she ever do you—who never hurt anybody except me—and that I half believe was in sheer carelessness?"

Another moan, lower, more pitiful than the last, caused her to clasp her eyes with tight shuddering fingers.

"Oh, this lingering agony hard by is too dreadful—too awful to bear!"

“That was Bambridge. Do I not know his voice?” reflected Hannah dreamily. “I fed him yesterday, yet he complains. He must be near his end. Can it be, after all these years of waiting—at last? I must see him die—I must! That light in the sky! Nimming Ned spoke of a rising of the people. I must go and see him. And yet—my prisoner—I dare not leave her.”

In extreme agitation the old woman crept up and down the room, rubbing her skinny hands together, and moving her lean jaws after a fashion which, in the fitful firelight to the tune of the howling wind, fairly appalled her companion.

“Bambridge nigh his end! Oh, wretch—let folk prate as they please, there must be a hell for such as thou! Look at my thumbs!” she turned and displayed two gnarled, distorted members to the gaze of Deborah. “Look at them and these great scars, and my leg, like a horse’s fetlock that’s cut with a clog. Look at my seared face, my blanched hair, and I no older than are you! Bambridge did that to please my lord who grew weary of his handmaid. They strove to slay me piece-meal. They slew my mind but not my body—no, not that! I am mad. I know it, for my mind will wander in my own despite, though I try so hard to keep it chained. But old mad Hannah is a blood-hound on their slot. My lord burns eternally, and I am glad. He fries and shrivels. So will Bam-

bridge. I wait, I wait ! His time draweth nigh. But hush ! A drunkard and a child blab forth the truth. I told my secret to the ground—dug a hole which would hold a gallon below the gibbet, whispered it there and buried it. But it shall come forth like Lazarus. Yea, it shall, and soon !”

The old woman was standing erect, her lean disfigured arms above her head, a dull glare of cunning insanity in her eyes. The other woman sank breathless within the chimney-corner. Hannah crept stealthily towards her.

“Lord Gowering’s daughter ! She too shall perish, for she holds my place—not mine, my son’s—my lord married me because I would not be his mistress, then flung me into a prison to die; but he’s burning for it. He swore I was never married, but I was, and kept my lines hidden in my bosom, which he stole and burnt one morning as I slept. Hagar and Ishmael were my boy and I. He, alas ! is dead, the lovely blossom ! I live—I ! the old withered stalk—woe is me ! For his memory’s sake I have prayed each night to God—with what a sweat of agony I’ve prayed—that slow sweeping vengeance may swoop upon her head who usurps what should be his. There lies her counterpart starving with the rest. Their time is coming—for one and all, thank God—at last !”

What was this so incoherently unfolded by the mad-woman ? Was it insane mirage or could it be

sober truth? In the tumult of surprise Deborah could not determine. Hannah was more demonstratively mad than usual on this special evening. She was unable to sit still—an electric restlessness governed her movements—something connected with the threatening rumble in the air. Muttering and mumbling, she moved backwards and forwards uneasily, then, raising the latch, stole out into the gloaming.

First she visited her mimic Fleet, peering eagerly at far-off London, over which hung a glow as of some great furnace; then, making her way with sliding steps over the ooze, she sat down under the gibbet, buried to the breast in the white vapour, that was like a sere-cloth; and held her brow tight to collect her thoughts. The chains clanked and creaked and swung—long-familiar music to her ear. A carrion bird flapped heavily away, crying to the night that he was interrupted in his repast. Swift thoughts, half-forgotten memories, ever-present vengeance gleamed through her puzzled brain. The dead men swinging seemed to murmur “Courage.”

Ah! those white-hot days of searing suffering which had dried the milk of kindness in her breast. Those earlier times when a reprobate old lord went through a wedding ceremony with a confiding girl in his bed-chamber; a ceremony afterwards so cruelly ignored. The picture of her child passed like a vision—her boy who was torn from her when Bam-

bridge commenced his reign—the iron of whose rule had eaten into her soul and wrecked her intellect. She never sought her son, for upon her release the parson who tied the knot gave her money, saying that the boy was dead, her lord remarried. Had she appeared before him what would have been her fate? Bambridge again, or worse—if such were possible.

It is a weary thing to live for vengeance alone—to clutch a devil to the bosom which is scorched up by the hellish contact. The wicked lord it was beyond her power to injure. He was great and powerful. He had toyed with, then crushed, the pretty butterfly which fluttered on with a faint remnant of life. Then he went to his account, while his victim fluttered still, darkly, aimlessly. Hannah's brain had been too evilly entreated to be capable of any more consecutive reasoning. She remembered Bambridge, vented her wrath on an innocent animal dubbed with his name, felt fiendish glee in encouraging young men in their career towards the gallows. Now and again a maternal longing dragged at her heart—a longing to know at least where her boy lay buried. At such times it was that she would wander in the dreadful city churchyards, looking for his name, heedless of miasma or contagion arising from those lately interred an inch below the sod. Drunken grave-diggers marvelled that she wandered thus unharmed,

for they knew themselves to be doomed men saved for awhile by drink; desperate men snatched from a violent death surely to fade by charnel fever. She never found the memorial-stone, and dimly wondered whether they had deceived her. But if ever the twain were to come together, what would there be of satisfaction in the meeting? They would weep over their spoilt lives in concert. A poor consolation truly. Oh! that flaunting Lady Grizel! How she had longed to tear her from her eminence, crying: “Bow thee before the true head of thy noble house!”

On a certain day, without Ranelagh, old Hannah had first beheld my Lady Grizel at bay before a mob, and a jar like that caused by shrill noise shot through her disordered mind. Thenceforward she tracked the maid of honour’s career, hating the girl with a fierce hate as the child of the woman who supplanted her. Instinctive, unreasoning hag! How could Lady Grizel harm her when the true head of the house existed not? For her own boy was dead. The parson had told her so with oaths; Bambridge had told her so with jeers.

The parson! He had wronged her by conniving at his lordship’s fraud. How good it was to encourage in crime the parson’s erring son! When Sim rode across the Mead, bearer of ring or snuff-box, how eagerly did Hannah prepare vice and crucible. Each successful raid was a nail in his coffin. The

easier she made his life, the more surely would it end with shame upon the tree! How strange it was that fate should drive the belongings of that parson within reach of the secluded crone. As every bullet has its billet, so for each fly is a special web spun to his undoing. First the son and now the wife! From the fatal moment when Deborah crossed her threshold, Hannah seemed to twist anew her unravelled energies. She watched her like a lynx. What was in the bundle which she guarded so carefully? The deceased parson's papers, his widow said when questioned. The parson's papers! Could they contain aught concerning herself? Not likely, barely possible. Hannah sat rocking below the gibbet buried in the winding-sheet of vapour, revolving these things by snatches. Her intellect was like a murky sky through which the sun glints for a second and is then shut out. The malefactors swung above, whispering "Courage!" She peered at the red glow above the city; heard the inmates of her torture-chamber feebly moan and whimper. They were near their end—all!—and was she to sit idly by the while? She dipped her hand into the hole dug with her nails, as if to feel that her secret was still safe, and laughed a long low laugh. Looking upward at the corpses, a light glittered in her eyes. Was it a reflection from the lurid sky? No; an inner light begot by the devil in her brain. Swiftly, impelled by a new-born resolve, old Hannah hobbled

to an outhouse, took thence a hatchet, felt its edge with hungry finger, and, still mumbling and laughing with a hyæna's chuckle, moved softly into the inner room. Trembling with cold and apprehension, for her visitor was unusually erratic this night, Deborah had raked the embers into a blaze and sat before them with her bundle open.

Those papers which Ames declared so precious—she had never looked at them. Why not strive to forget her sad plight by passing some in review? Two greasy well-thumbed note-books, and a few loose sheets bound together by a thread. Incongruous marriages solemnised within the Fleet. Marriages induced by unholy lust, by terror or by greed. Here a pencilled note telling of how a modish lady succumbed to the blandishments of her coachman, but, repenting, had paid ten guineas for the destruction of her page. “Married John Ferren, gent, to Sarah Nolan, spinster; for which I was paid a kerchief and a silver button; both after were extorted from my pocket, and, for fear of my life, delivered. Akerman to Lydia Collet, for a crown, which Akerman turned out to be a woman.” A melancholy register of human passion at its vilest. Hearing a soft movement behind, she glanced up and started, shrieking, to her feet. A menacing shadow danced upon the wall. Hannah, with a cunning smile about her lips, and grey elf-locks streaming, was creeping on tiptoe, a hatchet in her hand.

“ Mercy !” screamed Deborah, falling on her knees. “ As you are a fellow-sinner, mercy ! I never harmed you. O God ! have I been lured to this solitary spot to be butchered secretly ?”

No sound within save the howling of the wind, the moaning of the animals. Hannah advanced closer, and raised the weapon in both hands. With the force of desperation the widow closed with her assailant. The two rocked together, upsetting the stool and wooden settle, which were the only furniture. Brought close together by their embrace, they looked into one another’s straining eyes, felt each other’s labouring breath, as they fought for possession of the axe. But Hannah, gaunt and sinewy, was the stronger of the twain. She bore the widow down, who, knowing that she had to do with an excited lunatic, gave herself up for lost. The hatchet whirled in mid-air. For an instant Deborah was free, and with the instinct of self-preservation she clasped the hag’s neck tight, who was thus unable to bring her weapon to bear upon her head. Vainly the crone strove to free herself.

“ Give way !” she hissed ; “ it is your time !”

The widow’s nerves tingled to the elbow. She felt her strength waning. Her fingers loosened.

“ Mercy,” she murmured, sinking on the floor.

A muffled footfall sounded on the sodden grass. The latch was raised by a familiar hand. A familiar voice cried, “ Hannah !”

The hag dropped her hatchet—Deborah fell swooning into Jasper's arms.

“How now?” said the latter sternly. “Have I come in time to prevent murder? Beldam—what means this riot?”

Dreamily Hannah passed her claws through her grey locks, staring at Jasper and mumbling wild words.

“Then I was wrong,” she whispered at length. “It is not yet their time; not yet. I thought that if the others were to go she had best go too.”

“The hag must not be left alone,” Jasper murmured, “or she'll do herself harm some day.”

As the crone stared at him, her eyes resumed their usual look.

“How changed, how changed!” she said, passing her fingers over his face. “Where have you been, my boy?”

“With an old friend of yours—with Bambridge.”

“Again? Poor heart,” she whispered sadly. “Hark! how he moans. I was right. I knew I was. He must be near his end. And so is she, the other one.”

“Yes! He is near his end!” retorted Jasper fiercely. “The town's agog. St. George's Fields are packed with rioters. The people's ire is kindled. They go from door to door bidding all light candles on pain of pillage. Men and women are dancing round huge bonfires in every street. See! how

the sky reflects their merrymaking ! Please God, by to-morrow's sunset the Fleet will be destroyed, that villain torn limb from limb. May it be given to me to do it with my own hands ! ”

Hannah's eyes sparkled. Throwing her arms about the highwayman's neck she kissed him.

Deborah slowly revived, and clung convulsively to Jasper.

“ Save me from her ! ” she begged. “ Take me from this horrible place—anywhere ! away ! ”

Wrapping his cloak round her he set himself to calm her fears ; but it was long ere she recovered from the recent struggle. Meanwhile Hannah leaned against the wall, absorbed in ecstatic contemplation of the morrow's doings. An hour ago she would have fought with teeth and nails rather than resign her prisoner. Now she looked on Jasper as the chosen instrument of retribution, and was prepared to obey his orders even more meekly than was her wont. When therefore he bade Deborah rise and go with him she offered no objection, merely nodding her head and listening to the moans hard by, infallible omens of the ensuing day's success.

“ We will go to Tewkesbury House,” said Deborah's protector. “ There may be dangerous work done to-morrow. You will be safe there for a time at least. I have a chaise waiting in the road beyond the thicket. Come.”

The pair departed, but had not gone fifty yards before Deborah remembered that her precious packet was left behind.

“Papers, you say? Move slowly on,” Jasper said; “I will fetch them and rejoin you.”

When the door closed Hannah had pounced like a cat upon the papers, which in the struggle were strewn about the room, and, hearing returning footsteps, attempted to conceal them in her bosom. An impulse of curiosity pointed to their perusal as possibly interesting to herself. Should the dear dead one ever return to earth, what better offering could she lay at a son’s feet than his mother’s marriage-lines? But the dead never return, alas! and her certificate was extremely unlikely to be among these documents. She battled desperately with Jasper, however, for the papers, declaring that he should have them on a later day, vowing they were not there at all, that she would die rather than resign them, even stealing in the direction of the hatchet in a moment of baffled entreaty. But Jasper could deal with the demented creature. Placing his hands upon her shoulders he looked her sternly in the eyes, daring her to strive against his will. She foamed and raged, but succumbed, for in his face there was something more conspicuous now that it was ploughed by prison discipline, which tied her by mysterious liens to this suffering man. She succumbed with a look of insane cunning, gave up the

books, which, wrapping in a kerchief, he placed in an inner pocket.

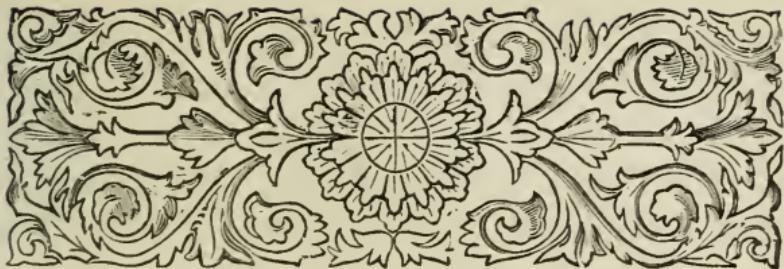
“Keep them there!” she said. “They are better in your hands than hers!”

“Scratchpole though I be,” he returned hastily, “I have never robbed defenceless women;” and so strode off; while she, swiftly bolting the outer door, sat down by the embers to examine the loose papers.

The books, under coercion, were given up; the loose bundle was retained. Papers! greasy, soiled, wine-stained. As she turned them over, the ghost of a past long defunct seemed to rise and confront the desolate old woman. The sight of that well-remembered handwriting, raising a corner of the curtain, threw a transitory ray of light upon her mind. That well-remembered hand, whose scrap of writing had been treasured till basely stolen in her sleep. What was this? a torn and sullied paper bearing her name! She started and bent down to pore over the faint blurred scrawl which stood for the name of Gowering. Disappointment! Grinding her teeth, she crumpled the papers together and raised an arm to hurl them all upon the embers. Gowering! Record of a marriage between John Bellasis, bachelor, and Grizel Gowering, spinster. What cared she for Grizel, who along with Bambbridge and Corbett was doomed to die?

The thought of the girl was odious for her

mother's sake. Again she raised an arm to fling the papers on the fire. No! Better not to burn the documents. Better again to turn them over. No record of her own marriage. Was it an hallucination, as the wicked lord always said it was? Perhaps she was never married, never had a son. Great Heaven! Perhaps she was born mad. The curtain came down again; the pall lowered on her mind. Vainly the hag tightened her fingers on her brow. These were not marriage-papers. They were gaily-painted playing cards. Here a queen—a smirking knave—a scowling king. They danced and gibbered at her as she looked, then paled to the well-known hand again. Throwing the parcel on the floor, old Hannah flung a tattered apron over her head and sat rocking, rocking through the night, while the corpses creaked and the winds howled, and the glowing embers became white ashes, and a blood-red glare hovered above the distant city, and her victims moaned and whimpered within the mimic Fleet.



CHAPTER VII.

THE GIANT AWAKES.



HALO of triumph hung over the city, for King Mob, like a young giant, had tried his sinews and found them strong.

During the day which ushered in Mr. Grenville's disastrous mistake, the crowd marched about the town with impromptu banners of petticoat and boot, or unfurled *North Britons*. An incongruous hydra of a crowd whose every head was threatening, whose features appertained to many an opposite class, from the dissolute clyfaker to the honest tradesman; from the distressed artisan to the Water Lane diver. Throughout that day did the crowd parade the streets, gathering in volume like a snowball on its passage, uncertain how to act or what to do until the petitioning weavers should have tested the temper of the King. It was tacitly agreed that St. George's Fields, as a vast space

capable of accommodating thousands, should be the common rendezvous; and thither flocked men and women as the day darkened, in straggling knots of twos and threes armed with sticks hastily caught up, or in bands of fifty and a hundred at a time. It was evident that a long-smouldering fire was about to burst into flame. Rebellious dust seemed floating in the air like the diseased particles which convey infection. Long had the Londoners borne misrule and oppression with faint murmurs; a time was come when they would bear no more; an opportunity was present which might not be allowed to pass. As if moved by secret springs, members of all trades streamed to the open fields, for there was not a trade without its grievance, and as each detachment arrived it was welcomed with a cheer. Bonfires were lighted, for the wind was sharp; trees, benches, palings were torn up to feed them; good-wives went home for cloaks and blankets, for in St. George's Fields all were resolved to camp till King and ministers should give way to just demands. Occasionally a patrol of light cavalry was seen among the skirting villas, but the aspect of the soldiers so exasperated the mob that those in command deemed it prudent to withdraw them.

Sir John Fielding walked fearlessly among the groups, armed only with his cane, exhorting every man to return home quietly; but though they permitted the officer of justice to wander where he

listed, they drowned his advice with ribald songs, and he was fain at last to depart, pursued by a crew of market-wenches, who joined paws and frolicked round singing “Jolly merry wives are we.”

That the terrible Sir John should be thus signally discomfited was in itself a victory for King Mob, who accordingly plucked up courage for even doughtier adventures. Speakers stood on barrels to essay their eloquence, vying in furious denunciations of Government, calling for three cheers and a little one in for Wilkes and Liberty, to be followed by three large groans in honour of my Lord Bute and the Princess, his beloved. A pursy little wig-maker inveighed in inflammatory language against the grievous fashion set by the King of wearing his own hair powdered in lieu of a peruke. Was it not a heinous crime so to take bread from poor men’s mouths?

“No worse,” yelled a frantic tailor, “than the disgusting habit lately come into vogue of donning plain coats of untrimmed cloth instead of embroidered silk from Spital Fields.”

To him another retorted that it mattered little what was worn since nothing was paid for by the quality, whereas poor wretches like themselves were forced to lay down ready money for their bread.

“Bread is at famine prices,” screamed a woman, “while as for meat, I have tasted none for more than a year past. A groan for the greedy master-

butchers," she cried, " who throw their meat into the Thames rather than fit their prices to our purses."

" You are right, housewife," observed one who stood nigh her. " I myself dragged five calves' heads from the water yesterday and sold them to a gentleman for his dog. If the poor be not better served we must even dress our children for the shambles. So will food be increased and the number of clamouring mouths lessened."

The noble army of footpads and cutpurses were not long in joining the crowd, not for what they could take from the poor folk, but in hopes of more glorious pillage later. It was evident that ministers would not succumb without a fight. There must be a tussle for it, a trial of strength. In such a tussle, which would mean houses burnt and homes invaded, who so likely to profit as those who had naught to lose? With them were associated hosts of 'prentices whose young blood was boiling for an uproar; hare-brained lads, who, once violently freed from leading-strings, would perforce take to the pad for a living, or, if more lofty-minded, to the road. There were link-boys too, squalid filthy vermin, with their grievance. A new system of lamps was being organised whereby the streets would no longer be completely dark.

" What a shame!" they howled. " Drunken beaux will be able to crawl home alone. There

will be no cosy obscure corners where we may help ourselves to perquisites from out their pockets. Are we too doomed to starve?"

And the beggars ; maimed, lame, halt, blind ; the swarm of victims, wrecked both body and soul by Bambridge and such miscreants as he ; and sham mendicants in hundreds. Sham soldiers and seamen disabled in the late wars, gunpowder-blasted mumpers, broken-limbed labourers, strolling clapper-dungeons. Here an ancient hobbling dissembler with legs thick-scored with artificial ulcers, there a ragged fellow whose beard was shaped like an old stable-broom, and whose cramped body assumed the paralytic movements of the falling sickness. Every phase of mock disease was so artistically rendered as to turn the gazer sick. It was on these men that Jasper had determined to rely, as *captains*, for his attack upon the Fleet. The fierce idiots who had been thrust ruined and maimed from out the common-side ; those should form the main body of his army.

Once within, they would recognise their house of torture, he thought, and rend their jailers like wild beasts. But these brawny drunken knaves who so cleverly personated that they had never felt, who knew no God but their passions, no goddess but the mistress of a boozing ken, they should form the van and drag down the hateful building stone by stone. A jovial crew they were, dancing round a fire, waving crutches and wooden legs on this cold

December day. He of the stable-broom beard
troll forth a ditty which was taken up in chorus
by many a hairy throat, and echoed across the
fields.

“Though begging is an honest trade that wealthy knaves
despise,
Yet rich men may be beggars made, and we that beg may rise:
The greatest kings may be betrayed and lose their sovereign
power,
But we that stoop to ask our bread can never fall much lower.

Then on with your nightcaps, and tie up your legs,
A begging let's go for the *Mauts* and the *Megs*;
When the *Mauts* and *Rumculls* have recruited our store,
We'll return to our boozing. Oh, pity the poor !”

Farther on near the central obelisk, a knot of sturdy mendicants might be seen wrangling with a troop of parsons; mulberry-nosed, snuffy, threadbare divines, such as understood egg-flip better than the gospel. A journeyman graver began the dispute with them; one who was famous for graving the Lord's Prayer, which he never said, within compass of a penny, and so considered himself a fit spokesman upon theological subjects. The parsons riposted at once in a covey, dubbing their hearers limbs of Satan, and were near getting ducked for their pains, when the graver declared that they should go scot-free if one preached an edifying discourse forthwith. Divines are essentially men of peace unless bullied beyond bearing. A very fat blue-chinned divine

was accordingly hoisted upon the obelisk-base, where he swayed for a moment or so in tipsy meditation, then spoke huskily as follows :

“ Gentlemen, you are most like the holy apostles of all men on earth, for which I congratulate you ; for they were wanderers, and so are you. They had no lands which they could call their own ; neither, I presume, have you. They were despised of all but their own profession, and so are you. They were often hurried into jails and prisons, were persecuted by those in power and endured great hardships, such as, I dare swear, are daily undergone by you. Their profession brought them to untimely deaths, and so will yours. But herein, beloved, do ye differ mightily, for the apostles from the tree ascended into Heaven, whither, I fear me, ye will never come. For as their deaths were rewarded by eternal glory, yours will be recompensed by everlasting shame without you mend your manners, you d——d scapegraces !”

This sally was received by a yell. The blue-chinned one vanished under blows from myriad hands, and his portly but undignified form was forthwith tumbled and jostled along towards a horse-pond situated conveniently at hand. But *noblesse oblige*, and the parsons, despite their professionally lamb-like meekness, dashed forward to save their cloth from desecration. There was a hand-to-hand skirmish ; clothes were torn ; wigs

flew in all directions, flour issued from them in showers.

The beggars had a spite against the clergy for not exhorting the Rumcullies to greater charity, and this was a fitting time for venting private malice. The open space, which before seemed like a monster fair, became like a battlefield by reason of broken crowns and bloody noses. Men cursed and women bawled. Other trades and persuasions threatened to follow the example set, for footmen hated chairmen; both united in enmity against French servants; smugglers loathed watermen; a bellicose rivalry existed betwixt 'prentices of every trade, which needed only opportunity to turn to open warfare. If Mr. Grenville had been there, instead of sitting at home stunned at the news he was receiving, he would have felt happier. For there is nothing more fatal to the ultimate success of a movement than internecine squabbling. Colonel Wilkes's labour of many weeks might have ended in cheek-scratching and an ignominious *saute qui peut*, if that wily person had not been a more skilful general than the bat Grenville was.

Unseen by the mob, he had sat all day within a tiny alehouse gossiping in the airiest manner with his friend Meadows on the last mode of hairdressing, while he kept one squinting eye vigilantly fixed upon what passed without. As each new detachment came upon the field he rubbed his hands,

for he was anxious to gauge the power of his *North Briton*, to test the temper of the steel which he was turning on those who had rashly declined to bribe him. Admirable material, he pondered. A sturdy chief or two and the thing is done. But how to secure these chiefs? Stone had satisfactorily arranged about the temporary advancing of money by the Jews. Sim Ames would do vastly well for one. Jasper, he thought, would do admirably for another. The poor fool being in earnest would need no pay. Such as he is the stuff of which martyrs are made. Those silly weavers who like geese rushed off to cackle to the King. What of them? No news as yet. But Wilkes was comfortable on that score, for he knew that his Majesty was out of town—shut up at Kew—and so could not receive them. Of a sudden he beheld the flight of wigs, the rush of parsons, the shower of blows and fisticuffs. This was grave and premature, and must be stopped immediately. He accordingly stepped out smiling, ostentatiously clad in British stuff, with ruffles of British lace and Spitalfields clocked stockings, and hurried to occupy the eminence just forcibly vacated by the divine. At sight of him a shout of “Wilkes and Liberty” arose on all sides; their idol was among them, the people forgot their private brawl.

“Gentlemen, gentlemen!” he cried, waving his hand in sweet deprecation, “are ye not ashamed? The enemy saith that Liberty weareth a red cap to

save her pate from cudgels. It would seem as if the foe spoke truly. If the people are united, all will be well. If ye fight amongst yourselves, abject slavery will be your fate, and ye will deserve it. Be firm ! We must root out the last fangs of Star Chamber tyranny. We must hand down blessed Freedom as the noblest inheritance to our posterity. Be firm and trust me. The little Number 45 shall be the glorious instrument of more good to mankind than were all the golden numbers of Pythagoras to ancient Greece. Be firm, or the crawling Scot will grip your throats to choking. He stands behind the Throne, the most treacherous, base, selfish, mean, abject, dirty fellow who ever wriggled in and out of office. I see in my mind's eye the northern road. It is black with flights of locusts. They come in masses to reap where they have never sowed. Your brawny arms are to do the labour—the fawning Scot is to devour the produce. Fail now in your demands, and the favourite will grind your bones to powder beneath his heel—the ogre Blunderbore. When at his mercy, I shall indeed weep for you !”

The dense crowd who were gathered round the obelisk looked sheepishly one at another.

“Go with us to the King ! And speak for us,” urged a man directly below the speaker. “ Apart from the favourite he will listen to our troubles.”

Colonel Wilkes smiled rakishly, but shook his head.

“ My good friend,” he observed, “ I neither court the smile nor dread the frowns of kings myself, but being, as I know, obnoxious to his Majesty, it would be rude of me to force myself into his presence. I go to no gentleman’s house who wishes not to see me, being neither taxes nor water-rate, nor a bumbailiff. Moreover, it would be painful to me to view my sovereign surrounded by his country’s enemies. I—”

The attention of the mob was turned from its pet orator, for an army was approaching from the west between the trees, headed by a band and red and black banners.

The weavers ! How had they sped ? As we know, who look down on faction-tossed England through a veil of years, the weavers had failed in obtaining an interview with Majesty. They came to the rendezvous as they started from Cripplegate, their grievances unheard. Certain lordlings, who could not divest themselves of the idea that fustian-clad backs were made for lords to thump, had indeed insulted the Spitalfields procession with pies and bottles on their road, in emulation of the orgies of the dawn. The procession had stopped, a few stragglers had offered violence, but the motive-spring of the loom-workers being the weal of their wives and little ones, to the exclusion of attempts at

rapine, the gaunt, starved, hollow-eyed men had called in the unstable sheep, and moved coldly along their road heedless of such gnat-bites. Sir John Fielding, who just now was here, there, and everywhere, looked grave when he observed their attitude, murmuring :

“That, if any, is the dangerous lot. Their jaws are lank with famine. Their eyes are sunken and dim. The wealth of others has no glitter for them. They claim their own, no more. These are the men who, once rendered desperate, will fight unto the death.”

Wilkes knew very well beforehand that the effort suggested by himself merely to save the ladies at the Feathers would prove abortive. He feigned deep concern however, exhorted all once more to keep together at all hazards, to be prudent, to be watchful in the common cause; to postpone all private quarrels for a later settlement. It was hazardous of course to allow so large a concourse of chafing spirits to remain unoccupied for long. A fox kept without food will gnaw his own brush, to the sorrow of the lady who would win and wear it. Hopes of some sort must be held out to keep these cohorts quiet. A little marching and illuminating might prove a salutary lasher for over-bubbling water. An express arrived post-haste declaring that the men of Wapping had risen, and were in arms; that they, bolder and more successful than

their brothers of the loom, were in possession of the docks. At all events the scout well knew, for he had seen it, that blood was flowing there like water on both sides. A rumour even was current of a pitched battle, at the close of which a print of the leering, jovial, naughty demagogue had been held up for worship like the hat of Gessler.

Wilkes was uncertain as to what advice was best to give, when Jasper, haggard, wan, disordered in attire, elbowed his way to the obelisk and removed his hat. The cynical spirit of the demagogue was tickled by the manner of his salute. That this haughty brother of her Grace of Tewkesbury, who when in feather was wont to execute so patrician a bow, should appear before him now in this humble guise was as surprising as it was melancholy. Ever since his return from Canada, Jasper professed deep reverence for the new patriot. Yet this form of worship, wherein profoundest bitterness concealed itself behind mock humility, was painful if titillating.

“Master!” Jasper asked in husky accents like those from out a grave—“the Fleet! may I drag it down stone from stone now? I have my contingent ready. I can trust them. Its stones are mortared with blood, welded with soul-tears. May we reclaim our blood, our tears—we, whose souls it hath swallowed up?”

Wilkes meditated and put off so important an act.

“Not now,” he said, “to-morrow. The sailors are at work. If you cannot sit quiet, join them.”

But Jasper shook his head. Racked by the pangs of his own life-brand, he had allowed himself to be carried away for a moment from the engrossing object to which his life was dedicated; and thought to himself that this postponement of his vengeance was a wise ordinance of Heaven. He might well be slain in the attack, and what then would happen to his sister? It was kind of Heaven thus to allow a breathing-space wherein Deborah might be recaptured and safely stowed away. So it was that, although he started for Sot’s Hole directly upon receiving Sim Ames’s hint at dawn, he changed his mind and set about organising his men for an attack upon the prison; which attack being postponed by Wilkes, he was enabled to reach Sot’s Hole after all in time to save the parson’s widow from the murtherous claws of Hannah. If Wilkes had permitted Jasper to have his way, Deborah would certainly have been slain; the witness would have vanished upon whose intelligence the success of Stone’s newly-planned scheme so much relied. Her papers would have remained in Hannah’s hands. Who shall say how differently this our chronicle might not have ended? How often gropingly do we work against our own interests. If Jasper—ah, dear! How many *ifs*! Let us wait and see what did occur.

Meanwhile Sim Ames, more shilly-shally even than his chief, wandered like a ghost that has lost its tomb, so uncertain was he what line to take. Who, in this doubtful war, was likely to have the best of it? The mob, which grew hourly in dimensions on St. George's Fields, was to his practised eye vast, but without discipline. On the other hand, the behaviour of Government was unutterably effete. The disturbances at Wapping were said to have taken a very serious turn. He walked down thither to reckon them at their true value.

Now if any class in London had a right to rise, it was this same class of Wapping sailors. They had suffered possibly more than any of the other classes of sufferers in London. For many among them were pressed originally against their will, and homeward-bound were kidnapped by crimps to be despatched again on service almost before they had beheld the Nore. Even when, under bat-like rule, war ceased to wage, their troubles still faced them ; for salaries were left unpaid, the subject of prize-money was ignored ; and painful pictures remained upon their minds of insufficient rations wherein maggots took the place of meat. A singular class of men were these hearts of oak. Brave ; tough as the hulks which held them, semi-civilized ; amazingly simple and ignorant ; reckless of past or future ; their eyes fixed only on the present. Their

grievances were great; the opportunity fitting; they rose with one accord and struck the nail upon the head at Wapping. That is, they took law into their own tar-stained paws, set a guard upon the river to prevent vessels from going in or coming out; held Shadwell and Limehouse in a state of blockade, and, in fact, stopped all traffic on the main artery of England. Little they recked of Wilkes or Liberty. Yet it was a war-cry as rhythmical as another. “Wilkes and Liberty!” they shouted then; “Wilkes and Liberty; down with the oppressor; bacco and beer and prize-money, and choose your own watchword.” All knew Wilkes by sight from the portraits of him which were gradually replacing Lord Granby and others on ale-house signs. A good fellow and a popular, if ugly—was not that enough? A cheer for Wilkes and Liberty; and forrad, brother tarpaulins, shoulder to shoulder, to the front! They paraded the east of London as the weavers did the west. They chalked 45 on every panel and shutter without knowing what it meant. As the turbulent troop advanced, window and door was bolted, and timid persons ran out by a back way. Even publicans barred their portals against the battalions, stubbornly refusing to serve rebels under arms.

Yet how little were they rebels! They claimed their own by right of service, and their own accorded, would, with characteristic bonhomie,

have gone their ways, dutifully saluting their officers. But here a complication arose. The coal-whippers, a sturdy half-savage race whose lives were divided 'twixt hard work and liquor, took umbrage at the fanciful proceedings of the salts. Shut the port indeed! Dictate terms to high and low, forsooth! No such insolence could be allowed. They, the whippers, lived by unloading coal. Their bread was taken from between their lips by so arbitrary a measure. The tars must withdraw their embargo or fight it out. The tars would do nothing of the kind. A fig for the dirty coal-men who were like nothing so much as dusky savages seen on tropical strands. The sailors were stalwart, good men all, bent for once on holding their own. The coal-whippers were a lower class, degraded, bull-throated, unkempt, herculean-muscled, dissolute. There seemed little doubt as to which would win the day. Both parties yelled out for idol Wilkes, neither cared what were the tenets that he preached, so long as wholesome fisticuffs and drink were the conclusion of the sermon. The two parties lurched about Wapping in separate bands, showing their teeth and growling, and were only finally brought to blows by a third batch which hoped, by setting one against the other, to procure the overthrow of both.

The river-smugglers or water highwaymen perceived that much advantage might accrue from

causing the two to clash. A reign of anarchy on river-side meant for them free right of pillage, robbery, wanton destruction of valuable goods ; consequent prosperity. They resolved that each should destroy the other, and sent forth emissaries to induce an attack upon a certain hostelry in Gravel Lane. Truly the Crown and Boot was an improper sign as times went. It was decorous and loyal in the sailors to take offence at so suggestive a cognisance. But as it happened this tavern was the favourite meeting-place of the Thames-side coalheavers, who recked no more of Crown and Boot than of Nightcap and Galligaskin. It was tight closed too, and the landlord being summoned poked forth his head to perpetrate a bad joke relative to a preference for *muscles* over *Wilkes*. This was enough. The premises of the insolent scoundrel should be pulled about his ears. He should be packed in one of his own barrels and sent floating out to sea. The landlord gaily bade the roisterers to come on, fired from an upper window on them, expecting each moment to be relieved by his sable patrons.

“Rascals, begone, or I’ll shoot !” he cried.

Mud and stones were the answers rattling on doors, crashing through windows. The noise was terrible, like a gang of men working on a ship’s bottom. Manfully the landlord and his barmaid held their own, exchanging shot for shot with

interest, for the balls from above told, whilst those from below merely struck into the ceiling then fell harmless on the floor. The fight continued all through the night, the sailors waxing more furious, the besieged more hopeless as hour after hour passed.

The colliers were away busily beating up recruits, and making havoc on their own account. They impressed those upon the wharves into their band, gave them the oath to be true to Wilkes and Liberty; upset carts into the road; tossed coals, corn, wood, into the river—so rapidly does evil example work upon the uncultured mind—and determined that rioting was a jollier trade than carrying coals. They burst into small alehouses, broached casks, set unprotected premises ablaze, till the smugglers declared they were worth a dozen of their rivals. In sooth, lawless at all times, they had little to unlearn before becoming complete rebels. The sailors, on the other hand, had their discipline to fight against, their respect for presiding deities, officers, and so on. But as chance would have it, no officers interfered upon this first night of riot.

The landlord should at least have commanded their respect, for he was brave. He crawled on his belly to the wash-house leads and picked off his man or two as one was saying, “ You who have arms are to fire on him, you who have stones are to heave,

and so many more are to burst the door and climb the wall."

Once, perceiving the utter hopelessness of his case, for his patrons came not, he shouted from behind a waterbutt, "How have I injured you? I will even light up candles if you choose."

The answer was a hail of stones, while one borrowed sleeve-buttons to load a piece with, whilst another called for pewter spoons and pots, swearing by his soul that he would pay for them. Mine host offered to apologise; to give them drink—the poor man, whose life and property were in peril through an ill-timed jest! But no! The callousness as to death, which was bred of the cruel laws, was on these sailors in their brawling. Of what value was this man's life more than that of all those who swung as crows'-food by river-bank?

The landlord strove to escape by a back door. A chink was in it through which those without could see his movements. They vowed with curses they would hang him to his lamp-post, roast, boil, broil him—this man whom they had never spoken to before! No matter; his joke was pestilent; for it insulted the idol whom they knew not themselves. Their blood was up. A scapegoat was wanted. What signified it whence that animal should come? Fire and brimstone, blunderbuss and bludgeon, have at him! for this one was as good as any other.

All through the night the siege went on. By

dawn every window was shattered, every shutter smashed. The besieging force willowed about like aspen-leaves, for many barrels were mulcted during hours of obscurity from less sturdy tapsters. The sailors were drunk, but victorious. They declined their victim's drink, for they could obtain sufficient hard by. The enemy riposted feebly from the windows. A yell—a rush of feet. The coal-whippers who were wantoning throughout the night in waterside bar-parlours had bethought them suddenly of their favourite haunt for a morning draught. It was a wreck. Coalwhippers and sailors, all mad with alcohol, rushed each on each with such weapons as were to hand. Pails, spokes torn from carts, shreds of paling, stones, fragments of wall-coping. The smuggling batch apparently had their desire. Their enemies were destroying one another. Gravel Lane was strewn with the dying and the dead. Men with shivered limbs were drowned in puddles of wasted spirits, choked in beds of beer.

At length the whippers were seen to waver and give way. The sailors had it! They pursued their flying assailants into the blind alleys, then reformed as well as their condition would allow, and marched off in the morning air to the rendezvous at St. George's Fields, there to encourage the other malcontents with tales of triumph. The Crown and Boot was wrecked. Its broken shutters flapped

idly. No one stirred within. Jasper and Sim Ames, who by chance, and urged by a similar sentiment of curiosity, met on the scene of action as the sun was striving to gild into beauty the hideous spectacle, pushed open the crumbled door. Smoke, black bullet-marks, fragments of falling plaster. The dead landlord and his barmaid weltering in their blood. Not a wall or ceiling without its mark, or a panel without its gash.

“Well!” Sim said, “the mob is a great power after all. This decides me. If I’m paid well I’ll join it heart and soul.”

“A great power!” Jasper echoed moodily, shaking behind his ears the soiled masses of his tangled hair. “Is it? This fellow did them no harm. Yet they slew his body and ruined his goods. An act of gross injustice. At midnight—a few hours since—we attacked the Fleet. If ever God’s vengeance went with man it should have gone with us. The place was guarded by troops. We might as well have striven to tear the walls down with our nails!”

“You were repulsed?”

“Aye!” nodded Jasper with a sigh. “We were repulsed with slaughter; Bambridge and Corbett gibed at us as we fled. But if there is a God above us, and I sometimes doubt it, we shall conquer yet. My sister safe, I swear to kill that wretch or perish!”

“His sister!” thought Sim Ames. “Time moves

on. I must go to Mr. Stone for orders.” Then he asked, “Did you take my hint about my step-mother?”

“Yes. She is safe at Tewkesbury House, and shall remain there till these disturbances are over. My sister is expected home. Pray Heaven, the rioters do not attack her on the road. A great power! Yes, the power of King Mob is great, but seems always to be used for evil—not for good.”

Sim Ames nodded and wandered away westward. As he looked after him it struck Jasper that he had been imprudent to say aught to his quondam lieutenant about the Duchess’s return.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE PASSING OF THE EAGLE.



WHILE Wilkes and his allies were fanning the flame of sedition in town, his Majesty the Grand Llama was undergoing throes of mental trouble at Kew. How could he calmly tend his plants when messages of such grave import were arriving hourly ? Grenville was astounded at the scum's audacity. So was Lord Bute. The Princess Dowager vowed that from the first she hated the English nation. She offered to come and console her “poy,” but the King firmly declined the honour. Dimly he began to perceive that one in his position had no right to play the Grand Llama at all ; that it was an act far removed from heroism to flee from a danger instead of facing it. Sending for Mr. Grenville one day in haste, he announced his intention of returning forthwith to St. James's with the Queen.

“These people who have broken the peace are after all my children,” he said. “My place is among them, not skulking here in seclusion.”

Both minister and favourite deprecated such a course. Both had intimate experience of rotten eggs and cats, and dreaded such an ordeal for their sovereign. But George was self-willed. Once his mind made up, there was no moving him. Charlotte too, his ugly duckling, abetted him in this, and he was beginning to look to her, his uncomely rib, for sympathy more than he was himself aware. On one point, however, he was firm against her entreaties. He would not see his mother or forgive her. He bade my Lord Bute, too, to hold his peace when the Duchess of Tewkesbury was mentioned. Vainly the favourite urged that at a moment when popular ire was at fever-heat a scandal in high life might produce wide-spreading and disastrous results.

George could not bring himself to forgive either the Princess or her ex-maid of honour. He fought hard even on the subject of Mr. Pitt, who, in his own despite, commanded his respect. But so far at length he yielded, and it was settled that Mr. Pitt was to be sent for.

The royal family quitted Kew in a plain coach, and drove to St. James's. At first the King looked out with interest, marking in surprise the general stoppage of trade. Everywhere houses were barricaded, shutters closed. The suburbs of London

were dead. With shame and anger he drew down the blinds and lay back sighing, for on each shutter, wall, and door, was scrawled No. 45. Who was King of England—was it himself or Colonel Wilkes? And these subjects for whom he had made so great a sacrifice. Insult, calumny, humiliation—these were the rewards they heaped on him for having cut out his heart.

As he pondered gloomily of these things, the young Queen strove to soothe his sadness, but he repulsed her roughly. She was a good creature was the ugly duckling. Time might cicatrise the wound; as yet he could not bear her hand on it. For was not pale Lady Sarah sitting on the seat opposite, listlessly watching the knots of people whom they passed—citizens hurrying out of their city, bands of 'prentices in holiday guise wending the reverse way to St. George's Fields in Southwark, where the camp of rioters grew daily more uproarious as fresh recruits poured in and the weakness of ministers grew more apparent? Once or twice the hapless young monarch had declared to himself that his burthen was heavier than he could bear, and he cried to God in his anguish that it might be lightened. His people loathed him. He was friendless in the world, for he began to blush over his affection for my Lord Bute, such dreadful things did the hated demagogue say of the relations of that lord with his mother. Above all, the woman

who held his heart was always before his eyes, fading slowly. The Queen, from the day of her landing, had taken a strange fancy to Lady Sarah. What excuse could be given for her removal from the household? Of her own accord the girl would not depart. She was as stubborn as he was, and she revenged herself upon fickle Majesty by juxtaposing upon every occasion her own beauty with the Queen's ugliness.

The royal coach entered the gates of St. James's like a thief in the night, as it were, in disguise. The Mall and adjoining streets were empty. Shop-doors were firmly barred. Each window gleamed with lights, for King Mob had ordained that honest cits must illuminate every evening in honour of the popular idol, under penalty of broken panes and wrecked furniture.

No one was abroad, for even the aged watchmen had been sent about their business. The chairmen were brawling in a body round the bonfires. Who should have cause to venture out? From time to time a band of rioters ran amuck, howling and whooping down a street, affrighting a prowling cat or half-starved dog, knocking at a chance door, refusing to move on till the inmates of the house appeared at a casement to give a huzzaing for Wilkes and Liberty. Now and again a procession danced screaming along the thoroughfares bearing at its head a boot and petticoat upon a pole.

Arrived at an open space the more energetic of the crew would tear up benches and house-palings for a fire, while others taxed the neighbouring mansions for drink. There the party would remain till dawn, drinking, dancing like demons about the flame, till weary of the jest they tossed the symbols into the fire, and went back to the place of rendezvous bearing on their shoulders such as were too drunk to walk.

For many days and nights these orgies continued unchecked. The Marquis of Granby longed to sweep the streets with troops, but ministers were undecided and would give no orders. So far the mob had done little actual harm. The attack on the Fleet had failed. At Wapping only had serious damage been done. Decent people looked to the young King, who was watering his plants. Verily the proceedings of the cabinet were a crying disgrace to the country. It was high time, unless complete anarchy was to supervene, for his Majesty to discharge incompetent servants in favour of old, well-tried ones. Where was the Great Commoner —he under whose guidance England had risen from her ashes? Burghers wagged their pursy chins sighing. No doubt the country had behaved ungratefully to Mr. Pitt. He was on his distant rock brooding haughtily. In truth the head of the old idol was made of gold; that of the newer one of basest clay. Sober folk murmured that a patriot

who fosters sedition even tacitly is a friend to his own interests, not to those of the common weal.

Both Bute and Grenville felt how incapable they were to cope with so grave a difficulty as this one. Grenville was so taken aback by the unsucces of his grand pageant as almost to lose faith in his own wisdom. Something must be done, of course. What? That was the question. My Lord Granby begged permission to rout the gathering in St. George's Fields. Mr. Grenville thought that would be very nice, but when he came further to think of it he was not so certain that it would. No. His special enemy was Wilkes, who had called him a puppy-dog, a base, mean, dirty fellow, and a great deal more. Wilkes must be annihilated, crushed, ground to powder. Then all would be well. The minister held a copy at last of the "Essay on Woman," that vile, blasphemous poem! Wilkes should be arrested on a general warrant, as originally arranged, thrown into gaol, his house and papers seized. Surely these were prompt and decisive measures, such as should stamp their inventor for ever as a statesman?

But now a blow fell on the political bat, of which he vaguely saw the awful future consequences, though he declined to admit them to himself. A vessel which, on the principle that ill news flies fast, had made a rapid journey from New York, arrived at Southampton with despatches. It was outrageous! The colonists dared to be in-

dignant over Mr. Grenville's pet piece of policy. They repudiated his Stamp Act and declined to be arbitrarily taxed. Was ever such insolence? Of course they, too, must be annihilated, crushed, ground to powder, etc. With the obstinacy and violence of thwarted incompetence, Mr. Grenville was for acting like some vile animal at bay. He would fly at the throats and eyes of those who dared to call his policy in question. They should feel his power, even if he died for it. And yet, that his position was a dreadful one he was, though blind, fain to admit. England was on the threshold of a serious rebellion. The Colonies were threatening to follow suit; the latter about a miserable tax. It was unkind, unfeeling of them, for money must be raked somehow into an empty treasury. These frantic people at home who were howling for Wilkes and Liberty were not in a temper to disgorge. The war had loaded the land with debt. Mr. Pitt's was the glory thereof. Payment for victories devolved on his successor. Mr. Pitt ought to be made to share the odium of unpopular measures. Lord Bute and his puppy-dog, although admitting their weakness thereby, determined that, humiliating though it be, Mr. Pitt must be called to help them out of the bog in which they floundered.

So it came about, that through the agency of the very persons who had ousted him, by whose mean machinations he had fallen at the zenith of his

greatness, Mr. Pitt was sent for by the King. Rumour whispered that he was at the point of death ; that his sufferings, which increased daily, were grievously aggravated by the position of affairs. Ever since the day when we saw him in the Abbey he had lain in bed, glaring at my Lady Chatham as though she were Red Ridinghood. The fond woman babbled to him as she swathed his feet of how things seemed inclined to right themselves, of how Grenville was showing unexpected cleverness, of how Bute was growing prudent, of how the King was abandoning his retirement to watch over his people. Mr. Pitt glowered but said nothing. He knew that in her love his wife was deceiving him, and the sense of his helplessness increased his pangs.

“Bute and Grenville, murderers !” he muttered at such times. “I left England at the apex of grandeur. To what have ye reduced her ? In how short a time !”

Then came the commencement of the riots. He heard strange sounds. Strange lights glimmered through his windows. Lady Chatham vowed there was a fair. He knew she lied. In mid-winter there never was a fair in London. One day a clamour of marrowbones and cleavers, of hoots, of pattering feet, sounded hard-by. Abruptly his wife left him, a window below opened, she was talking to the crowd. With an effort the gaunt invalid rose upon his crutches and followed her.

“For pity’s sake, spare this street,” she was saying, “for the best friend of England, your Great Commoner, lies sick unto death !”

Her voice was choked with sobs. The mob was awe-stricken.

“Alas for you and us then, madam !” a burly butcher answered. “For mayhap England, too, is in her death-throes. King and ministers are alike degraded. The nobles revel in the stews. One of the greatest ladies of the land is to be tried, they say, for a crime which merits hanging. The people must look to themselves now. Happily they have one friend left. A cheer for Colonel Wilkes, mates !”

Hastily Lady Chatham closed the window lest her lord should hear. He was standing behind her, trembling and grey as ashes.

“Oh, Hester, Hester ! My poor country !” he groaned, and falling prostrate was carried back to bed.

The King was two days in town before the mob discovered the fact. Looking up St. James’s Street out of his window, his eye met constantly the leer of hateful Wilkes. The head of the demagogue had replaced those of less popular worthies, on every sign, by order of King Mob. Everywhere, scrawled in chalk, charcoal, paint, was the insulting number 45. His Majesty turned wearily away, holding his throbbing temples in

both hands, for under stress of never-ceasing trouble his brain spun, his eyes were veiled. Often in the silent watches of the night he muttered aloud :

“ Oh that my death could save this unhappy land !
The weight of my burthen is killing me by inches !”

The poor young Queen listened, pretending to sleep, and wept. Verily that royal couch was not stuffed with roses.

By dint of watching my Lady Chatham’s health gave way. For twelve hours she was too ill to move. During those hours when she should have been most Argus-eyed her lord was at the mercy of servants, who, like most servants, cared little if he lived or died. A courier came demanding instant audience—a courier from beyond seas. Would Mr. Pitt receive him ? Of course he would. Now that kind Cerberus was ill herself, he would take this opportunity to learn the truth. The courier brought a memorial from the Colonies which had been his tenderest care, begging their father to intercede in their behalf.

“ We apply to you, our foster-parent,” it said, “ from across seas as a powerful advocate ; our liberties being in sore jeopardy.”

Memorial after memorial had been sent to my Lord Bute, to Mr. Grenville, in vain. Would the Commoner, as good and true as he was pure, stand up in the House and speak for them ? Rather than submit to injustice, for their children’s sake, their

children's children's, they would resist the demands of the mother country, even at the sword's point. Mr. Pitt dismissed the messenger and pondered. Die? No! He would not die. As strange things, apparently most hurtful, will sometimes cure a dying man, this despatch which Lady Chatham would have destroyed seemed to instil fresh life into her lord. His eyes burned with a feverish fire. His spectral aspen hands steadied themselves by sheer force of will. He was the only man who could save England. He knew it. He would live. God surely did not intend Britain to be wiped quite out. When He set His bow in the clouds as an ever-recurrent symbol of divine mercy, He but said in parable what was afterwards made clear. Sins that are scarlet may become white as wool. Corrupt England had sinned—how deeply! Her aristocracy was a blot on the world's face. Glory and honour had been showered on her. She had misused the boon. Now she was punished. Though her stripes might be many, she should surely not be made to sink under her chastisement. The days of Sodom and Gomorrah might not recur. Mr. Pitt, the ascetic and the pure, should be allowed once more to raise her. He would not die just yet.

When the message came that his Majesty demanded his presence, he arose from his bed with alacrity. It was as he thought. He believed not in the cruel Jewish God who took such delight in

accurately weighing by prescription a full dose of pain. He was assured that God's chiefest, noblest attribute is Mercy; that, unlike the dream of purblind fanatics who choose to picture Him as a bloody taskmaster over cowering slaves, He is constantly robed in the rainbow hues of Love. The patriot had prayed earnestly for his country. His prayer, it seemed, was heard. His enemies called to him for succour. Though weak and miserably ill, he would don his trusty armour once again. But for his country's sake, his King's, his own, it behoved him first to sweep out the Augean stable. Grenville and Bute, bat and blown-out frog, must be sent packing. On these terms he would take the tiller once more; on no other; for, hampered by such scarecrows as they were, his hands would be tied unto his side. Whilst his valet and faithful Lady Chatham dressed him, he revolved these things. Pale, and like a corpse, he entered his chair—the chair so well known in London by reason of its protuberance in front for the comfort of his gouty limbs—and started for St. James's. The Lady Hester would fain have gone with him, but fondly kissing his wife he bade her remain at home, taking with him though, for the easing of her mind, his little son William, aged ten. Proudly the boy trotted by the chairmen's side across the open Mall, where groups were gathering as the news spread that his Majesty was

out of hiding. People were staring at the hideous palace, sacred to frightfulness and discomfort ; but blinds were drawn down as if death reigned within. Cits murmured, “ Is it indeed true that he is again among us ? If so, he draws his blinds to see as little of his faithful lieges as he may.”

On all sides the groups parted, bowing as the familiar chair swung along with its stalwart bearer and proud little boy alongside. Yet many gravely nodded as they looked upon the white visage in shadow. The Great Commoner ! It surely was a century since men kissed his footmen and his horses and clustered on his coach-step. A century or more —for from zenith the land was come to nadir. That white figure borne along was a mummy of the prosperous past brought out to mock them. Respectable burghers in broadcloth and silver buckles were on the Mall to-day, for it was their duty to let the rabble see that, for the sake of order, they were ready to rally round their King. Indeed it was whispered that the worshipful Lord Mayor and his aldermen were coming in procession from Temple Bar to congratulate his Majesty on his emerging at last from a shameful retirement ; to beg him to remodel the ministry, to make him feel once for all that it is actual crime in kings or queens selfishly to shirk their responsibilities. Every cit felt that it was so. It behoved them all to assist my Lord Mayor by rallying around Royalty upon the Mall.

The sedan of Mr. Pitt passed into St. James's, with the little lad trotting by its side ; and the gates closed on it.

The King sat by a table littered high with papers. His look was glassy, his movements those of an automaton ; a handsome young man enough, but heavy and peevish. The favourite, with hands behind him, strode up and down the room. Though now past middle age there was no denying his fine presence. Tall, broad-chested, clean-limbed he was, with his celebrated calves bewitchingly clad in amber hose. A vastly grand peruke framed his stately head. The garter star and ribbon on his breast seemed to nestle there by right. A nobleman in aspect to the finger-nails was John Lord Bute ; what wonder if the vinegar-visaged Princess doted upon her Scottish Earl ? A third figure lolled in a dark corner, picking its patrician teeth in silence. The pages of the backstairs, like little birds twittering in presence of a hawk, announced the advent of the Commoner. He was carried, consequent on his infirmity, into the chamber in his chair ; its roof was raised, and poles withdrawn. His attendants retired to wait without.

“I am sorry to see you in such a plight,” observed the King, with an effort to be civil ; conscientiously striving to forget the past.

“I grieve to see your Majesty’s realm in such a

plight," returned Mr. Pitt sadly. "Unlike Rome, our capital runs the risk of being destroyed by geese."

The King bit his lips. It was a bad beginning. Lord Bute came to his rescue.

"Our august master," the favourite began in pompous accents, "perceiving with sorrow that his best friends are unpopular, is prepared for the common good to waive his private feelings. With deepest woe I admit that, for causes unknown to myself, I am not in the very best odour with the mob. The taste of the rabble is uncultivated. It consists of dunder-headed grooms whose souls are soaked in beer. Can I attach blame if my motives are misconstrued by them? Surely not. I merely deplore the fact, and bow before necessity. Ahem! Called by my King to take the reins of government, I beheld myself on hollow ground surrounded by a hedge of cabal; and so I resigned, lest in my fall I might drag my master with me."

"The public discontent dates from the King's accession," interrupted Mr. Pitt. "You thought the prerogative all-sufficient, no matter into whose hands it fell. You used it to stem the tide of conquest contrary to the people's wish. You became a tyrant; leader of many petty tyrants. You were driven from your eminence by public odium justly merited, and in your wickedness placed in your stead one even less capable than

yourself. Oh, that I should have to say it of Bute and Grenville!—upon the first of whom honours have been poured with lavish hand—of whom the second is my dear wife's brother! Grenville and Bute are murderers. They have slain their mother upon the altar-steps of their selfishness. Who now may stanch her bleeding?"

My Lord Bute looked furtively at the figure in the corner ere he went on with hesitation.

"I am more generous than you, Mr. Pitt," he stammered. "Your disorder leaves your tongue unbridled. I am prepared to leave the country—to retire abroad if needful—in fact to become an exile for the good of his Majesty."

"Mazarin was twice exiled out of France," returned the Commoner with a sneer, "but governed as absolutely when absent as when present."

"Sir! your temper is unbearable!" cried my Lord Bute, fuming. "You call yourself a patriot, prate of a bleeding mother. We even admit to you our distress, show the rent in our armour, and you cannot forego the paltry pleasure of running a bodkin through the breach. For shame! Look at his Majesty."

The King was leaning on the table with his head buried in his hands. How much was he doomed to drink out of this bitter chalice? As a supreme concession he had sent for the man whom he considered to be his enemy, and here was an unseemly

wrangle being carried on in his very presence. Could no one respect their hapless sovereign—he, who always meant so well ? Would no one forego their insults ?

“ Mr. Pitt,” said Lord Bute abruptly, “ what are your terms ? You alone in England have sufficient prestige to turn the tide against the demagogue. This Wilkes has flouted us all, and hourly grows more dangerous. What are your terms ? The King will grant them beforehand. A pension at once, with your wife’s peerage transferred in the future to yourself ?”

“ My terms,” replied the Commoner, raising himself slowly in his sedan the better to peer from under his huge periwig into the favourite’s face, “ are these. Your banishment from British soil for ever. The return to favour of the leading Whig families whom you ousted at the accession of his Majesty—those great persons whose integrity and position have weight and credit with the nation ; the free pardon of Colonel Wilkes.”

“ The pardon of Wilkes !” cried all his three listeners at once. “ Impossible. He must be annihilated, crushed, held up as a terrible example. You are distracted !”

Mr. Pitt sank back on his pillows with closed eyes. The aspect of this sick eagle was awful to them. He seemed but to hover near the earth, ready at any moment, if thwarted, to take flight.

And yet they were prepared to acknowledge him as their only saviour.

The three looked at one another, and the King spoke timidly.

“ You propose a general rout. You used to love George Grenville once——”

“ Never again !” murmured Pitt without opening his eyes. “ He is untrue to others as to himself. False because weak ; weak because false. Weakness engenders fear, and fear cruelty. I will none of him.”

Grenville emerged from his corner and pocketed his tooth-pick.

“ I know you by your step,” continued Pitt. “ Your conduct is a continued series of weakness, temerity, despotism, ignorance. You have much to answer for. God forgive you, George.”

His brother-in-law moved hither and thither in agitation.

“ William, for Hester’s sake,” he began.

“ Yes, ignorance,” went on the invalid coldly. “ Together with the most notorious servility, negligence, and corruption——”

“ Sire,” cried Grenville in a rage, “ will you hear me thus insulted ? My Lord Bute, you dare not desert me—knowing what I know. Pardon Wilkes ! I will never consent to such a thing.”

Lord Bute turned pale, the King winced.

“ Gentlemen !” he murmured helplessly, “ do not forget the presence in which you find yourselves.”

Poor prince ! how little they recked of his private feelings or his position at this moment.

“ His Majesty is the greatest courtier in his court,” observed Pitt with a sarcastic smile. Then, opening his eyes and perceiving how the young man suffered, he controlled his wrath no more. “ You !” he said, turning so fiercely on his brother-in-law as to make him start back. “ You will not permit it ? Mole in a beetle’s trappings ! you ? Wilkes lays gins for your wretched tantrums, intending to become a martyr thereby ; and, blind idiot that you are, you fall into his snares, and then you shrilly shriek like a courtesan in a passion. The author of the *North Briton* is the blasphemer of his God, the libeller of his King. Be it so, let Parliament protect the King’s honour by decisive condemnation of the libel—no more. As for this silly scheme of a general warrant and arrest ; it is madness. In peace-time such a warrant is illegal—a formidable instrument, which, like a water-torrent, bears down the fences of private security. With one party Wilkes is a patriot of the first magnitude, with another he is the vilest incendiary. I am unmoved alike by his vices or his merits. To me he is a British subject, who is to be subjected to no treatment foreign to the law of the land ; above all, he must not be allowed to clutch a crown of martyrdom. Wilkes, I say, shall be pardoned,” concluded Mr. Pitt decisively, as though to close the argument.

The King raised his hot face out of his hands, and murmured in excitement :

“ He sets his dirty shoe upon my neck !”

Lord Bute looked embarrassed ; George Grenville flew in a passion.

“ I have not been dismissed as yet, sir,” he cried, “ and I say that his Majesty’s wishes shall be carried out to the letter. Wilkes shall be taken on a general warrant and imprisoned. There lies the warrant on the table, already signed by my Lord Halifax.”

Mr. Pitt picked up the paper between the ends of his long fingers, then laid it softly down again.

“ The space for the prisoner’s name is blank,” he said. “ It is exactly like a *lettre de cachet*.” After a pause of perplexed thought, he turned to his brother-in-law and asked abruptly : “ Have you recent news from America ?”

Grenville looked anxiously at the King and stammered “ No.”

“ Liar as well as fool !” retorted Mr. Pitt with scorn. “ You have ; and so have I. George Grenville, you have dragged your King and country to the verge of ruin. You and this lord here have degraded England in the eyes of the whole world. America, whom I left full of love and gratitude, is, thanks to you, on the eve of revolt. She will not submit to your wicked measures, and I am glad of it. Three millions of people so dead to Liberty as voluntarily to become slaves, would be fit instruments to enslave

the rest. America will never wear chains ! If Britain and America are drawn up in adverse array, what matters it who wins ? A conflict would bring down ruin upon both ; the bond betwixt the two would be wrenched in twain for ever ; by the surrender of her fairest possessions the lustre of England would be tarnished !”

“ You were asked here,” interrupted the King, “ to advise and help, not to upbraid.”

But the Commoner heeded him not. He had risen to his feet, and was staring into space with eyes like red-hot coals. His Majesty, despite his resentment, was shocked and sorry to perceive how changed he was. His chest was shrunken, his back bent, his face of an even grey—a galvanised corpse. His stupendous intelligence seemed to linger only in his eyes.

“ If she succumb in the struggle,” he went on like one in a mesmeric sleep, “ in the life-struggle which, in my mind’s eye, I see, she will fall like a strong man. Embracing the pillars of the State, she will pull the constitution down along with her. I peer into futurity. A mighty breach is in our fortress ; its battlements are dismantled and its very walls totter ; the citadel lies open to the invader. Nought remains to us but to stand in the breach, to repair or perish in it.”

With a gasp Mr. Pitt stumbled backwards, and fell upon the cushions of his chair, while his pale

lips were stained with crimson. His Majesty, rushing forward, caught him as he fell, and burst into tears of remorse. The great minister was indeed sick unto death. How small seemed his own petty vexation and wrath, now that its object was passing from before him. The wounded eagle was flitting towards the sun, moving with heavy wings to the horizon along the golden glorious pathway of the sea—to go with the sinking sun into another clime, to an unknown haven of peace and rest. He was flitting from the land of fretful turmoil and cabal ; and the inexperienced young King was to be left alone upon the shore—watching the passing of the eagle wistfully.

Young George knelt sobbing by the chair-side, holding the patriot's thin hand in his.

“ Be gentle with America for my sake,” Pitt whispered, as he panted for breath. “ Clasp her in fond arms as the parent doth the offspring whom he loves.” Then turning feebly he muttered : “ My Lord Bute, is this your boasted Peace ? You have not sheathed the sword in the scabbard, but in the bowels of your brethren. Above all things, sire, be merciful ! Mercy shall re-seat the King in his people's hearts. The thousands brooding of rebellion will then pray for him. I hoped that I— might——”

The invalid endeavoured to say more, but became unconscious. His Majesty rose from his knees, and,

touching a bell, ordered his attendants to be summoned. The chairmen entered, followed by the little boy, who, at sight of the still white face, as wan as the pillows upon which it rested, set up a prolonged cry.

“Who are you, little boy?” asked the King, stroking his long curls.

“I am William Pitt,” answered the little lad without fear.

“Kneel and kiss the hand of his Majesty,” ordered pompous Lord Bute, who could never forget deportment.

“I won’t kneel to nobody that hurts my papa,” cried the scapegrace stoutly; then crawling on to the knee of the silent figure, he buried his flushed face in the pillow and wept the boiling tears of childhood.

The chair was closed; the staves were run into their rings. The little child was shut in with the battered statesman, who had fallen a prey to long-continued mental grief and bodily infirmity. Sadly the *cortége* returned across the Mall to where gentle Lady Chatham was awaiting her lord’s return. The Mall was crowded now. St. James’s Street and the adjoining alleys were thronged with excited men. Some shook their fists at the palace, others gazed anxiously citywards. Something more than common riot was afoot. Sure the malcontents would not dare to assault their King?

A deep sensation was created by the appearance of the chair. "Mr. Pitt is dead!" somebody said. "No, no, not so bad as that," said another. Two gentlemen were standing hidden by an angle from view of the palace. The tallest of the two reverently doffed his hat as the *cortége* passed.

"I respect the statesman," Colonel Wilkes observed in his cynical way, "if he does not respect the demagogue. Therein I have the advantage over Mr. Pitt."

So passeth the Great Commoner from the stage of this our chronicle. His fond wife removed him at once to his country seat at Hayes, where, during many months, he lay in a darkened room 'twixt life and death, while the fate of his beloved colonies was trembling in the balance. We shall look no more upon the haughty lineaments of him who was one of the very brightest, purest stars in Britain's diadem of heroes. Living an unsullied, unselfish life in the midst of an ocean of vice, his virtues were never fully appreciated during his lifetime. A consciousness of extreme superiority was the cause of the haughty and oftentimes overbearing pride which was his chief blemish. Such trivial blemishes are like the spots upon the sun, which serve to show off its brilliancy.



CHAPTER IX.

THE GIANT SHOWS HIS STRENGTH.

HE departure of the clay of the illustrious Pitt left his Majesty in extreme disorder of mind. It seemed as though his good angel were turning her back on him. He saw clearly now when it was too late, that since his accession he had been clinging to straws. While he was at his elbow he had spurned his true friend. Now he wailed for him in vain.

Lord Bute was standing by the window in a fine attitude; the bat was fussing about the room wrapt in his own importance. His brother-in-law had said harsh things. He was quite glad that he was ill, would not be sorry, so sore did he feel, to hear of his demise. The King was in the hands of these two men, to be bullied like a slave, battle-dored like a shuttle-cock. At the starting of his reign he blessed Bute for freeing him from the

thraldom of the domineering Whig magnates, headed by haughty Pitt. He boasted then that the Crown should never again be enslaved by an insolent cabal. Alas ! this was a tyranny, hectoring, blustering, in exchange for which he would gladly wear almost any chains.

Mr. Pitt spoke truth, he felt, when he accused these false friends of dragging king and country to the verge of ruin. The country in a blaze, the colonies smouldering, the King reviled, his mother stigmatised, his favourite pursued with universal execration. So stood the case ; there was no denying it. How should an ignorant young stripling stem so fell a torrent ?

“ Oh, mother ! ” he groaned ; “ your responsibility was great, and you neglected it. I am stupid, uneducated, utterly ignorant. Would it not be the better for my people if I died ? ”

My Lord Bute looked on calmly. It is a mental fever, he thought. The crisis will pass. He will be himself again.

George Grenville was anything but calm. He strutted and puffed and fumed. Of two things he was resolved. These pert baby-colonies should be taught their duty. At once and for ever a strong hand with a birch in it should whip them. The abominable Wilkes, who dared to call him puppy-dog, should sing out for mercy and not find it. This general warrant now upon the table, illegal or

not (by using it now a precedent would be established), should be put in force on the very first opportunity. The newspaper pageant was a failure because it lacked terror. This must not again be said. Fire and brimstone! If needful, the troops must be let loose—the horrid dogs of civil war! The scum must be trampled to pieces; the kennels run with blood. The tottering ministry must win the respect due to fear, since love was out of the question.

“You will never gain my consent to such a measure,” the King said firmly. “There have been over-many executions in this unhappy city. Callousness is the only result of so much judicial murder. If I live, I swear by Heaven that the criminal code shall be amended.”

Mr. Grenville growled, but held his peace. It is ill-arguing with pig-headed people. He would have his way when the time came, and coerce the King. He did not speak, for my Lord Bute, with an exclamation, called him to the window. A host of men with colours flying were pouring down St. James’s Street—a bellowing throng with blue cockades and banners, headed by something black and two musicians playing violins. What could this mean? The worshipful the Mayor was expected to arrive during the morning, to deliver an address of sympathy. Surely it was not he surrounded by this rabblement?

We must go back a little to understand what was happening. The camp on St. George's Fields had been growing larger hourly since first the bonfires were lit there. The sailors returned in triumph from their raid on Wapping, chose a special field for themselves which they fortified, taut and ship-shape, with planks and stones. A selected number of armed delegates emerged thence daily to levy food on the surrounding houses—a mere matter of bar and pickaxe, for the houses were all deserted, their contents an easy prey. Members of other camps (for each trade remained isolated) also went forth each day in search of victuals, and when two bands met there usually ensued a wholesome semi-jocular exchange of blows. The camps for the most part were friendly one with the other, for all wore blue cockades and rallied to the watchword, “Wilkes and Liberty;” the nights were spent in drink and revelry. The vast assemblage looked from the top of Paul’s like some huge ant-hill inhabited by festive glow-worms. Certain trades, however, declared open war. The coal-whippers longed to revenge themselves upon the sailors who had worsted them in Gravel Lane. Moreover, like tigers that have tasted blood, they burned to break into those grand mansions about Bloomsbury, and wallow amid the trampled treasures. One night they made an onset on Northumberland House, demanded barrels of beer, and even forced his

Grace to drink with them. Was it not brave to hob and nob with a live duke in velvet, ribbon, and diamond star? He was so affable that they spared his mansion, gave him a cheer, and returned to the fields again, bent on deeds of still greater prowess. It was remarkable how orderly the rebels were during their first few days of rioting. A great deal of singing there was, of kissing servant-wenches, of chalking 45 on everything, of breaking into houses merely for food and liquor. But this soon merged into a less innocent state of things. Stone, having arranged his terms with the Jews and coaxed Meadows into actively pushing his charge against the absent Duchess of Tewkesbury, was all for carrying fire and sword into the enemy's quarters. He clearly proved to Sim Ames that come what might Lord Bute was arrived at the highest pitch of odium, and could be of no further use as a patron. It would be the part of a wise man to make hay while the sun of sedition shone, and having gleaned his little sheaf, to carry it comfortably to France till a pardon could be obtained. It would be a sad pity, he argued, if so golden an opportunity for nest-feathering were allowed to slip. Why! In ten minutes more treasure could be secured in the event of some serious disturbance than the most crafty highwayman could collect in a year.

Stone knew that his witness was gone from Sot's Hole, but he did not know that Sim Ames had

given a hint to Jasper on the subject. He felt that it was his own fault for placing her at Sot's Hole at all; though no human foresight could have suspected that her Grace's brother would escape so easily from Bambridge; and if he had not done so, Sot's Hole would have been as safe a place as any other. This matter of Jasper's escape was a mystery which sorely troubled Mr. Stone. Whom could it be, he wondered, who had used his influence to obtain his hurried trial? Bambridge declared he did not know. There seemed indeed to be no knowing. But one thing was patent to the tutor's mind; and that was that treachery stalked in the camp somewhere. Would it circumvent the scheme he had so carefully prepared? Who was the hidden enemy? All things considered he was not sorry for Deborah's removal, for Tewkesbury House was a snug prison enough, and he promised himself that Master Jasper should not spirit her away again and conceal her without his own spies being cognisant of her hiding-place. He therefore established a spy-system around Tewkesbury House—a cordon of secret knaves who daily reported to him everything which took place about its precincts.

Mr. Stone, who considered himself a good judge of character, believed that he might trust Sim Ames, provided that he could prove to him that his interest lay in being faithful to him. He accordingly lectured him and used every argument conceivable

to demonstrate clearly that Lord Bute's day was over; that there was no use in wearing the livery of that collapsing frog; and Sim Ames ended by being convinced. He promised then to put his shoulder to the wheel. He knew that some seven hundred desperate men were living in the lanes by Houndsditch—broken soldiers, ruined gamesters, unsuccessful collectors. One infamous street was entirely occupied by receivers of stolen goods—a species of Alsatia which the law was too feeble to suppress. He called forth these ruffians from their dens, sent them by dozens to creep about the camp on St. George's Fields disseminating ideas of rapine. Under their auspices the gangrene spread wider and more wide. The coal-heavers, encouraged to abandon themselves to impulse, became more and more noisy, brawling, and threatening. The camp was divided into two factions—the one honestly trusting in its motto and bent solely on redress of grievances; the other caring no whit either for Wilkes or 45, merely using both as a cloak to conceal an unbridled course of outrage and murder. The weavers, as Sir John Fielding's practical experience had acknowledged, formed the most respectable class amongst the rioters. Their emaciated faces, sallow skins, and oppressed air enforced pity. They turned a deaf ear to Sim's agents. Not one among them but wanted justice and would have it, or by the sky above they would

have vengeance—full and complete! The sailors were not so virtuous. Without higher wages, and arrears of prize-money paid up, they would not return to work. Meanwhile they held the port of London, amused themselves occasionally by sinking a vessel or two, had no objection to a raid now and again, if only to keep their hands in. The officers, who should have chid them, resolved to remain neutral, for in this instance Government was flagrantly in the wrong.

The worshipful the Mayor, in the hope of discrediting the proceedings of Wilkes and his admirers, chose a somewhat inopportune time for a display of loyalty. He organised a procession of influential merchants who were to assure his Majesty that his humble subjects adored his person and respected his government. This was just the moment for Stone's lambs to frolic. No less than eight hundred Tory merchants assembled before the Mansion House, some in coaches, some in whiskys, some in open chaises. The worshipful the Mayor—Mr. Harley—although fat and bull-necked, thought proper to mount a horse, under some vague impression that, armed as he was with an address like a truncheon, his aspect would terrify the unruly by a resemblance to the equestrian figure in Leicester Fields. With difficulty his stout little legs were stretched sufficiently apart to straddle across his steed's broad back; and once mounted, his troubles

were far from being over. He swayed to right and left, clung wildly to his old peaked saddle, but notwithstanding would undoubtedly have toppled into the mud, civic robes and all, if two sturdy banner-men in armour had not been told off to clutch him by both knees. One Alderman Paunchkin, who was spiteful because he deemed himself more worthy of the ermine than his stout chief, implored him to ride in the state-coach, but the worshipful one frowned darkly, and in the effort nearly slipped over the horse's tail. Under these circumstances it was quite clear that the procession was doomed to crawl at funeral pace. For the dignity of all it would never do for the first magistrate to come to trouble. The *cortége* started therefore with much slow pomp and moved along Fleet Ditch towards Temple Bar, where, to its dismay, the discovery was made that the gates were barricadoed on the outer side. With a courage born of despair the worshipful one, supported by the men in armour, remarked that my Lord Mayor wished to pass. The announcement was received with laughter, while a shower of mud and stones came whirring over the ancient barrier, rattling upon the panoply of the knights. The horse, disgusted at such a proceeding, began to curvet—the worshipful one swayed for an instant, then flung his arms with effusion about the neck of his supporter on the right. A voice cried, “Old dame, go home and don thy nightrail!” Some seamen, clambering up the bar,

emptied foul water on his head ; there was a panic among the loyalists, which might have ended in ignominious flight, had not Alderman Paunchkin, leaping from his whisky, adjured his lordship to be dignified. If needful, all must be lost *sauf l'honneur*. Under a continued hail of mud the *cortége* retreated in good order, valiantly determining to achieve its object by a circuitous route. At the corner of Gray's Inn Lane, however, there was another stoppage. A hearse with plumes jammed across the narrow thoroughfare barred the passage for a time, whilst a lawless concourse was busy piling a wagon high with furniture and bedding which was tossed from windows out to them. Another wagon was procured and treated in like manner, then the two were deftly driven till, coming in contact with the heavy signs and overhanging first floors, they were scientifically locked, overturned, and so formed an impenetrable barricade. Swarms of rioters climbing to its summit discharged a deadly fire of brick-bats at the unhappy loyalists as they approached, who sheltered themselves beneath their vehicles, huddling like sheep in a hail-storm, until the worshipful one, struck in the stomach by a stone, picked himself out of the mire and, gathering his robes about him, fled shrieking through the nearest archway. As a flock jump after the bellwether, so followed the Tory merchants helter-skelter. The nose of my lord bled apace, and mingled with his greasy tears. The mob hallooed

and sacked the carriages, crying “A bonfire! a bonfire!”

The more brave among the merchants held a council, for the case was serious. The chief magistrate was bearded on his own ground. Encouraged by impunity, the next attack might be on Majesty itself! Here was a spectacle of many hundred mutineers suddenly let loose upon society, parading with truculent ribaldry the streets of a capital which was absolutely defenceless. For constabulary force there was practically none, while as for the soldiery, since their defence of the Fleet they had remained, their hands before them, without orders. The Lord Mayor laid down the axiom that his first duty was to his own bones, and the general feeling was in favour of endorsing it; until Alderman Paunchkin, declaring such a craven sentiment to be a disgrace to the city, snatched up the address, mopped his muddy gown with a towel, and called on all but curs to follow him. Unhappily the vending of groceries and a martial spirit do not always go together. When he sallied forth again his following had dwindled from eight hundred strong to little over sixty weak.

The mob, enchanted with its victory, was gone with jubilant acclaim upon its way, headed by the hearse, whereon stood one habited as an executioner having an axe in his hand and his features concealed with crape. This mummer, by signs, di-

rected the crowd, and was apparently its leader. He called upon two errant fiddlers to lead the way to the palace. His Majesty desired, it seemed, a pageant. Well! he should have one. The seamen, who marched in companies, each commanded by a boatswain with a whistle, hailed the suggestion with delight. Here was a chance of having their grievance righted. They rushed on at a quick trot. The alderman and his diminished party came up with the hearse in Leicester Fields, whither he had arrived by another way; and, heedless of stones and mire, followed in its wake up to the palace door.

The sailors demanded forthwith to see the King, and paused for the twinkling of an eye at the sight of something fluttering from a window. It was nothing but a curtain swayed by wind, but the alderman seized the moment, entered the courtyard with his detachment, and the gates swung to. The sailors with a yell of disappointment dashed at the woodwork; the man with the axe urged them on with oaths and motions of the hand, bidding them loudly to force the entrance that the hearse might wedge a way open to the presence of their sovereign. Two lords, who arrived in chairs, were dragged out by neck and heels, and violently outraged. The mob, egged on by their broad-shouldered leader in crape, struck up a chorus of "God save great Wilkes, our King!" The officers of the guard of honour beat to arms, but the mob, pressing against

the muzzles of their firelocks, dared the red-coats to fire.

The decorous cits in the Mall had fled at first sight of the approaching flood. Wilkes and Meadows remained hidden behind their coign of vantage, for the former shrewdly surmised that his presence might be wanted later at some critical turn of affairs. He knew that Lord Bute was within the palace, and puckered his ugly face into jocund wrinkles at the thought of his pet foe's jeopardy. He had seen a messenger steal forth into the park in the direction of the Hercules' Pillars, and rightly conjectured that the man was gone to fetch Sir Fletcher Norton for the reading of the Riot Act. He chuckled whilst contemplating the exceeding folly of those in office—the folly which permitted the head of the State to enter a revolted capital without any special precautions being taken for his safety. In truth it did not seem worth while to fight with such an enemy, for, left alone, he of a surety would cut his own throat. Bute and Grenville seemed capable of any rashness. Not so the clever Colonel, who, respectful of his skin, was resolved to take no active personal part in the proceedings unless upon emergency. He was present on the spot as others were—out of the merest curiosity of course; had even taken the precaution to have handbills circulated begging in the name of the *North Briton* that his friends would abstain from

violence. These bills were couched in such luke-warm terms, however, that they were unlikely to produce much effect.

There was another dash at the strong gate, which shook but budged not, followed by a hush. What was going on ? Wilkes could neither see nor hear. Curiosity gaining the better of discretion, he advanced into the crowd. Lord Bellasis was haranguing the people from a window over the archway.

“ Honest tars ! how dare you thus to threaten the person of your master ?” he shouted. “ Do you come out with sticks and staves as against a thief ? You who have won so much honour against your country’s enemies—who have spilt heroes’ blood in the Crown’s name—why appear thus with menaces against your best friend ? Beware of the cozening leader who beguiles you. Passion always leads mortals more than reason, and that is the chief weapon of such demagogues as Wilkes ! Sailors ! fling away your sticks and depart in peace. Then mayhap his Majesty may graciously consider of your complaints. Armed, he will surely be deaf to your entreaties.”

Lady Sarah, who was peeping down through the chink of a half-closed shutter, observed that the foremost spirits looked one at another irresolute.

Then Lord Bellasis was not merely a little prig, she thought. There must be stuff in the man who

would face an angry mob alone. She was glad of it for her sister Gladys' sake.

The seamen, accustomed to obey orders, began to waver. The ingenious Mr. Addison tells us in his "Cato" that the woman who hesitates is lost. So also are the men. Each honest salt glanced sheepishly at his staff or broom-handle with an evident intention of throwing it away.

Wilkes rapidly considered whether he should commit himself by speaking. A window opposite her Grace of Marlborough's mansion opened. A head and arm protruded from it gesticulating to the man in crape, then withdrew, yet not so quickly but Lady Sarah could identify the features of Andrew Stone emerging out of ambush. In answer to the signal the fellow on the hearse urged on his horses, shouting to those about him to beat in the gates.

"Heed not that prating lord, mates!" he bawled. "These conies burrow together. Let us unearth them!"

But the sailors, whispering to one another, would not advance. Playful rioting was one thing—assaulting the Lord's anointed was another. They began earnestly to wish that he of the axe had not led them upon this worse than wild-goose chase. A clatter of approaching horses, a confused hum and hubbub of singers coming from Charing Cross. An army headed by a fluttering boot and petticoat.

Drunken coal-whippers these, who, having paid a second friendly visit to his Grace of Northumberland, whom they mulcted of yet more liquor, had proceeded to smash the windows of the Princess Dowager. Arm in arm in strings they lurched along Pall Mall, sweeping from the roadway distracted dogs and cats, sole denizens of the deserted street. Perceiving the presence of their natural enemies by their blue jackets and short white kilts, they charged forward with a howl. This was the time to wipe out the stains of defeat at Wapping. Have at the rascals then, who, by closing the port, had thrown the unladers of vessels out of work—who had cruelly slain the bar-wench of their favourite tavern—who had set then the example of bloodshed and of homicide ! Drunken besotted dare-devils were these coal-whippers. Sprinkled among them moved groups of ruffians from Houndsditch—desperate scoundrels mounted on stolen horses, who, knowing that Tyburn tree must be their ultimate fate, were cheerfully prepared to meet it in exchange for a few days of wild debauch and license.

The man on the hearse cheered them on with repeated blows of his axe upon the gate. Still it budged not. Lord Bellasis, with admirable presence of mind, cried to the sailors to blot out their error by standing in defence of their sovereign. The opposing mobs met, wrestled, clashed, swayed

to and fro together. Strong arms wreathed serpent-like round brawny throats, whereon congested veins stood out in knots; dry lips breathed hot and short upon dry lips; bloodshot eyes strained from out their sockets as men struggled to save their feet from tripping—for instinctively they knew that those who fell would be trampled to instant death. Legs twined round legs—yells and screams as men stumbled and went down rose to that upper chamber where the King sat shuddering. Like a furious sea the adverse parties lashed, and boiled, and tumbled about the palace threshold. Colonel Wilkes, much against his will, was swept between the hearse and gate, where already a heap lay stifled out of life. Another clatter of hoofs from a contrary direction to the last—a detachment of light cavalry galloping in haste alarmed by the messenger. But the work was done without them. The sailors, who were sober, were too much for the whippers, who were drunk.

The man with the axe, endeavouring to turn his horses and so flee away unrecognised, caught the box of his wheel betwixt the railings and upset the hearse. Lord Bellasis perceived with intense relief that his tact had won the day, but determined to cap his victory by capturing the mysterious ring-leader. He pounced out of a side door and seized him by the leg just as his wig and crape rolled in the gutter.

“Ames!” he cried, “surrender, for I know you, and please God you shall swing for this.”

Sim Ames, discovered, fought desperately to free himself. Stone at his watch-tower turned pale. If Sim was taken what might he not confess? Would no one save him? Yes. Colonel Wilkes, swept by the tide against the palace wall, decided also that knowing what he knew he must certainly be saved.

“Take care, my lord!” he grinned, seeming to stumble between the combatants, “do nothing rash. If these savages take you, they will tear you limb from limb!”

The ruse saved his *protégé*, who vanished in the throng. Lord Bellasis turned in fury on the smiling Colonel.

“You are an infamous malignant plotter!” he bawled. “This disgraceful scene is your scheming —you squinting scoundrel!”

Wilkes turned livid.

“My Lord Bute used that expression once,” he said softly, “and he has bitterly repented it!”

“Your *North Briton* is a cowardly stabbing in the dark — yes, cowardly — you vulgar liar and traitor!”

The blades of both flashed from their scabbards, but the swords had scarcely crossed before the Earl’s foot was caught among the garments of one that lay dead, and he fell backwards pinned to the door by Wilkes’s rapier. Lady Sarah, throwing back her

shutter, shrieked. The Colonel prepared prudently to retreat after so untoward an accident ; he could not, for his way was barred.

By this time the handful of troops had arrived upon the scene. The whippers stood at bay in Piccadilly, having been chased thither by the repentant seamen. The courage of Mr. Grenville rose. The tempest past, the bat plumed himself ; even the shrunken frog began to blow himself out again. A little ashamed of his inaction, Mr. Grenville bustled down the stairs into the courtyard, loudly demanding why nobody had arrested the obnoxious Wilkes. The latter knew better than to appear to fly. Rapidly surveying his position, it was clear to him that this was yet another blunder of the enemy. With the meekness of a Christian saint he wiped his sword upon a cambric handkerchief and handed it gracefully to an officer.

Arrest the idol ! The honest tars were hazy as to Wilkes. They knew, however, that his name was a watchword coupled in every mouth with Liberty ; that for some reason he was adored by a large proportion of their fellow-countrymen. This was a harsh beginning which boded ill with regard to the King's clemency. For a second time they wavered and took counsel. The officer who had harangued them was being borne, apparently a corpse, within the palace. He could not, therefore, interfere in their behalf. They would not again commit the error of

trying to force a way into the King's presence. But neither would it do to permit an exercise of arbitrary tyranny. Sim Ames (desperate now that he had been recognised) appeared again in their midst shouting, "A rescue!" Changing its course, down swept the flood once more in the direction of the palace. The naval force, gladly yielding to the coalmen precedence, remained neutral at the top of the street. Mr. Grenville retreated in haste, leaving his order uncancelled, for in his short-sightedness he hugged himself as adamantine. Wilkes was enchanted. Here was the palm-branch and martyr's crown at last. His aspect would have melted the stoniest heart to tears as he took his seat beside a soldier in a coach. In doing so his eyes met Bute's furtively regarding him from ambush, and the favourite felt an uneasy qualm at the victim's malicious leer of triumph. Certainly the demagogue was looking quite pleased with his arrest. Down swept the flood. The driver was dragged from his box, the horses from their pole. Some one with a slap sent them trotting away with loose traces hanging.

"I tell thee, Master Wilkes," a bluff, coal-stained fellow said, "that horses do oft draw asses. Thou, being a *man*, shalt be drawn by men! Whither shall we drag thee?"

"To the Tower!" returned Wilkes demurely, with a side-flash at my Lord Bute, "where the Govern-

ment of my country thinks fit, it appears, to send me."

"Never! never!" yelled the excited crowd. "To the Three Tuns in Spitalfields, where we'll drink the health of Wilkes and Liberty! A rescue!"

The Colonel, placing one hand upon his heart, stretched forth the other to command silence.

"Friends!" he said, "I will go to the Tower in obedience to Mr. Grenville's warrant which arrests me, for none shall say I disobey the laws. It was by accident that I was present at this day's tumult. I did my best to prevent that which I cannot honestly condemn, by distributing handbills for the sake of public peace. I used my poor influence in vain, and bow to the superior judgment of the people. I glory to be allowed to suffer in your cause. My noblest reward shall ever be in the applause of this great, free, and spirited people. In a fetid cell as elsewhere my ruling passion shall be love of England and of our free constitution!" Here Colonel Wilkes wiped away a glistening bead of sorrow while he paused for breath. "Alas!" he continued sadly, "by a dire mishap I have wounded a noble of the land. In this I cannot blame myself, for by personal insult he roused my ire. Take me to the Tower, gentlemen! I shall appeal to the laws, and owe my sure discharge solely to the vigour of my innocence. I would humbly crave for my

valet to go with me that I may be refreshed by the luxury of shaving and a clean shirt. If not convenient for my captors to allow me so small a boon —no matter—then without murmuring a long beard and dirty linen ! Nay ; ye may not touch a hair of this poor fellow by my side. He but obeys orders. Lead on, gentlemen, with decorum. To the Tower !”

As the patriot concluded his short oration his voice faltered, and the mob with a long-drawn sough of sympathy fought for the honour of dragging a martyr’s chariot. The sound swelled into a shout, which was taken up with a yell by the whole vast host of rioters. “To the Three Tuns ! To the Three Tuns !” was the general roar as the tribune of the people departed under escort of his subjects from the threshold of his rival. As the cavalcade progressed he went through a pantomime every now and then, as though objecting to the route ; and while the vast stream increased, which gained tributaries from every lane and alley, he amused himself, for mischief’s sake, by assuaging his companion’s terrors, declaring that none should harm him, for he could sway the multitude by a finger-wave. In this public and edifying manner the idol was conducted to the hostelry we all know so well, which is yclept the Three Tuns. There mine host prepared an elegant repast for him, threw fresh logs upon the hearth, broached barrels of prime October

for the behoof of the idol's worshippers. A bleak day gave place to a colder night. The mob danced gaily round the bonfires in St. George's Fields, for look on their proceedings as you would, a victory most certainly was gained. By bearding the lion in his den the people had displayed their strength and threatened to use it. By retiring from the palace-gate on the first injunction, they had bowed to regal authority. By rescuing their idol they had clearly shown that the rival majesty of King Mob was not to be flouted with impunity. Numbers of citizens turned out in the guise of constables, dreading dangerous work during the still hours. Shop-keepers sat up watching with blunderbuss and pistol by their sides. The camp upon the fields was merry. The sailors danced. The weavers brooded. The bivouac of the coal-whippers alone was silent. They and their new allies from Houndsditch, and several hundreds of wild apprentices to boot, were loose upon the streets. The danger for the present was from them. They had tasted blood and liked it. Flame and smoke rose up, blinding the stars. A holocaust was burning on the altar of liberty—a sacrifice of crumbling homes. The boding glare was become a fire—who might presage its limits?

Ere morning dawned Wilkes had slipped by a backway from the Three Tuns, and in obedience to the warrant wended alone towards the Tower.

“Who are you, and what do you want?” de-

manded a somnolent sentry of the cloaked applicant.

“I am Colonel Wilkes, the patriot, at your service, who surrenders himself a prisoner,” was the courteous retort. “Lock me securely up, for by dawn all London will be raving round your fortress. Though not on visiting terms with your master, yet do I venture to claim his hospitality.”

The governor, on being waked from a heavy sleep ensuing on consumption of five bottles, swore while he rubbed his eyes that this tribune must be a lunatic.

“Many have gone disguised out of prison,” he grumbled. “This is the first in my experience who surreptitiously crawled *in*.”

Even from his chamber within the hoary citadel Wilkes could see the lurid glare of burning houses.

“Stone is wise,” he muttered. “His paid agents do their work well. Where was the unpaid one in whom I placed my trust—this soul-seared bastard brother of her Grace of Tewkesbury? He was absent to-day. The Duchess! Ha! ha! Her vessel nears the rocks. Poor reckless foolish creature!”

Colonel Wilkes, tucking his blankets tight, slept an infant’s innocent sleep; so did Mr. Grenville, conscious of a brilliant display of statesmanship. He had shown his iron hand. Sim Ames and his new friends were awake, busily employed in a massacre of household gods.

So was the unfortunate young King awake.—Awake and tossing. He lay grievously sick, attended by grizzle-wigged physicians; racked by violent convulsions and paroxysms of raving delirium, caused by the dire humiliations of the last few hours. He had drunk of the chalice down to the lees. Its dregs had proved too bitter for him.



CHAPTER X.

ON THE DOVER ROAD.

DURING the period which occupies us, an unpleasant, and many would imagine an un-English, habit pervaded all classes—that of espionage. His Majesty the strutting sultan, deceased, loved tittle-tattle; therefore it behoved my Lady Yarmouth and the other sultanases to gather scraps of scandal by every means. On the principle that the King can do no wrong, the nobles followed the example set, and so everybody was occupied in spying his neighbour. From force of habit my Lord Bute set spies upon his dear friend George III., though their reports must have been monstrous dull, dealing chiefly with solitary sighs and diurnal plant-watering; Mr. Grenville set a spy upon my Lord Bute, whose duty it was to discover whether he tampered with the opposition; Andrew Stone established a whole flight of assistant

eyes and ears in the neighbourhood of Tewkesbury House, through which he saw and heard everything connected with that establishment.

By this means he discovered that her Grace the Duchess had sent in a smack, from Calais, a maid and courier to see that sheets were aired for her accommodation at Dover and elsewhere, purposing to follow in her own yacht so soon as she was rested after journeying. But he did not find out that Jasper, whom trouble was imbuing with superstition, laid the blame of his failure against the Fleet upon duties unperformed. It was clear to Jasper that he was the chosen weapon for the slaying of the miscreant Bambridge. But then he too might fall. Therefore he evidently ought to help his sister through the difficulties which overshadowed her before devoting himself to his other mission. He wandered about then like an uneasy spirit among the camps in St. George's Fields, during the many days of riot, until, unable to endure the suspense longer, he started on his horse for Dover, lest haply a misadventure should befall my Lady Grizel on the way. He also did a little spying on his own account, by means of civilities to the ex-tutor's spies, and so became informed with gloomy forebodings of the grave dangers which were growing around her Grace. Sim had opened his eyes to the fact that her enemies ardently desired to prevent her return, in order that a slipshod trial might conclude

with a conviction *in contumaciam*. What Stone's tactics really were he could not make out, for Deborah was permitted to remain at Tewkesbury House in peace, although there was no doubt Stone knew she was shut up there. Of Deborah, Jasper could make nothing. Since the shock of her struggle with mad Hannah she fell into alternate paroxysms of wild fury and deep despondency. At one moment she implored to be saved from the horrors of Sot's Hole ; at another she imperiously demanded to be set free, that she might instantly leave London.

It was certainly by a merciful dispensation of Providence, who evidently on this occasion was bent upon befriending the gay Duchess, that Jasper had written that hurried scrawl in prison. In the first place, much time was gained thereby ; in the second, Jasper read his sister's character well enough to know, that while in her careless way she would postpone moving in a matter which only concerned herself, yet might she feel impelled to energetic action if her brother lay in peril. He wrote to her a scrawl whose every stroke told its tale of agony. When through Meadows' gratitude he regained his freedom, it was to become aware that that very benefactor was engaged in a plot which should cancel his gratitude.

Easy-going, good-natured, lymphatic Meadows was dazzled by the rhetoric of Stone and Wilkes.

He formally demanded a trial of the late Duke's widow. The numberless enemies which so much beauty and success had bred for her rallied round the heir-at-law with acclamation. A rule for a trial was granted with all possible speed. The legal documents informing her of the fact and bidding her prepare to answer the charge were intercepted by Stone's agents. It looked very much as though, after a *féte* at distant Dresden, she might wake up to find herself unduchessed and undone.

But that little letter from out the terrible strong-room upset the schemer's calculations. Sim's gang, acting on his directions, stopped and robbed the Dover mail-boy night after night, till people cried out that such persistent havoc among their correspondence ceased to be a joke. No letter to her Grace was found, simply because Nimming Ned had posted it several days ere the havoc began, while Stone was pursuing his many schemes contentedly. Her Grace was dancing when the paper arrived, the envy and despair of a covey of serene highnesses, whose serenity and myriad quarterings were unable to obtain for them the grand air and queenly carriage of the brilliant stranger. She was minuetting with a grand-duke when an oddly-folded paper was thrust into her hand, which she placed in her bosom till the dance was over. Retiring then to a conservatory, she opened it, and a pang seized her heart as she recognised her brother's writing so

strangely cramped, and saw a smear of blood under the signature.

“He was being tortured slowly to death,” he wrote. “Nothing could save him but his sister’s influence.”

Jasper in torment ! Her only friend. She went straight to the Electress, who adored her ; explained that urgent business required her presence in England without delay, and ordered her equipage for the morrow.

She started, and travelled day and night, accompanied by an escort of cavalry as far as the Saxon frontier. At Calais rumours reached her concerning herself, at which she laughed. At Dover Jasper met his sister, who was shocked at his changed aspect and hollow cheeks. For her he still had a smile, however, as he explained that more urgent business than she dreamed of required the immediate presence of the Duchess in town. She laughed his forebodings to scorn.

“What childish folly !” she said. “Deborah will never turn against me. Even if she does, what then ? No certificate exists. I can show that that dark tutor owes me a grievous grudge ; that Meadows (whom I befriended by-the-bye), not unnaturally, would like my fortune. Ames is dead, so is my aunt. Nonsense, brother ; your morbid fancy conjures up chimeras. It is not pleasant, of course, to be the subject of *esclandre*. The moment I arrive in London I will see my old friend and mis-

tress, the Princess Dowager, who shall quash the whole affair at once.”

The Duchess’s assurance gave Jasper courage. Perhaps she was right. His troubles had made him morbid. At all events they must press on with as few stoppages as might be. He would accompany her, for the coal-whippers and others were abroad, who made a point of assailing every vehicle which bore a coronet. “The faster people strive to go, the slower they speed,” is a worn adage which contains much truth. The Dover road in winter was always bad. This year it seemed worse than usual —more quaggy, more beset with holes. The ducal carriage jolted till poor Miss Bate, her Grace’s chief woman, fairly squealed with pain. Her Grace only smiled, and, with forcible language, bade the postilion hurry as she took a pinch of snuff. At Canterbury they slept. At Ashford the coach was overturned, one wheel shattered under its weight, while the ornamental perch snapped like a frozen twig. The Duchess scrambled out quite unconcerned, laughed loudly at her tire-woman’s pitiful plight, and demanded of Jasper what was to be done next?

“ You must proceed at once,” he answered, “ in a hired chaise, for it is essential you should be safe before the rioters commence their nocturnal devilry. I will have the carriage looked to, and catch you up before you reach the city outskirts.”

Nothing could be obtained at the inn but a whisky or gig, with a hood and two big yellow wheels, which, indeed, mine host was loath to part with, having heard that the coal-whippers found carriages a convenient substratum for a barricade. When he ascertained the rank of his guest his manner changed ; indeed, he quite hoped that his vehicle might be destroyed ; for everywhere in England the name of Tewkesbury was associated with untold wealth, and there was no knowing what might not be screwed out of the lady in exchange for succour in extremity.

Miss Bate and her mistress were accordingly hoisted into the lofty body of the whisky, its hood was thrown back, its apron tightly buckled. Two horses drew it tandem-fashion, a boy riding the leader as postilion. There was little fear now of being assaulted by the rioters. Sure a duchess never entered London in so homely a manner.

Meanwhile what were Wilkes and Meadows doing ? what Stone and Sim ?

The morning succeeding the Colonel's eccentric entrance into the Tower found, as he presaged, a furious crew clamouring at its gates. By permission of the governor, he showed himself upon the outer wall, made a neat speech, in which he declared, with his elegant hand upon his breast and a smile upon his lips, that he was extremely comfortable. His valet had shaved him, he wore a clean shirt. By

careful dieting he intended to compensate the want of air and exercise. He professed himself a warm friend of the house of Brunswick, a humble, faithful subject of the King, declaring at the same time that no prince was ever served by such ignorant, despotic, insolent dolts of ministers, who gave a glaring proof of their folly now by persecuting an innocent man. "Do not make a noise here," he concluded. "Go whither you will, and God bless you."

Obedient to his wish the mob dispersed, breaking into houses on their way back to camp, tearing open shops (for all on their route were closed), flinging valuable goods into the mud, festively attiring themselves in fashionable gear, drinking up such spirits as they found. But returned to the fields, news was brought by Sim and his associates which transmuted their frolicking to fury. Fatuous Grenville, resolved to be adamantine, had sent officers to Wilkes's mansion in George Street, who had seized all his papers and occupied the premises by virtue of the general warrant made out without a name. Whooping and yelling the crowd rushed thither. The street was blocked; each end of it being held by a detachment of troops. The sight of their uniforms acted on the people as a red rag on a bull.

"Fire on us," they cried, "if you dare! Fire on your brethren, Cains!"

The soldiers stood motionless but threatening, and the mob, a little daunted by their resolute air, re-

treated slowly. The report at all events was true. Their hero and idol was being hounded down. What meant this arbitrary seizure of his goods in his absence? If they could not save him, at least he should be revenged. The burning cross sped swiftly. Coal-whippers, ruffians, wretches with a price set upon their heads, sham beggars, all united, tore along the empty streets, leaving a trail of fire on their track. That night was chosen by adamantine Grenville to clinch the ruin of his enemy. In Parliament a lord rose up in his place to inform his compeers with sorrow that a horrid poem had been written by a hopeless reprobate called Wilkes, who was now happily in durance. The dreadful literary slime was entitled “*An Essay on Woman.*” He read a portion aloud with gusto, while the lords groaned. That lord read it well, knowing it by heart; for my Lord Sandwich was once a fellow Medmenhamite with Wilkes, and was accustomed to troll out its lines at many a drunken bout. Another noble lord, who also had been a Medmenhamite, shrieked out with outraged virtue “*No more!*”

It was unanimously resolved, at the instance of Bute and Grenville, that the inditer of such trash ought instantly to be crushed, annihilated, jumped upon. He must be set up as a scarecrow to the terror of other offenders. He should be crushed, etc., etc., at once—deprived of his Colonelcy and his seat in Parliament. Rascal, devil, fiend! Nothing

was bad enough for him. It was a pity that, being a popular idol, he might not be pressed as well. How gladly would Grenville have placed upon his naked form “as much as he could bear, *and more!*” and after have leapt upon the mass to squeeze his hateful life out of his mutilated clay. But even fatuous Grenville perceived that such policy might be dangerous. His Majesty, in intervals of delirium, was restive. Though the frantic mob were burning down the city, yet would he not permit the troops to fire on the people.

“No, no!” he always moaned. “No more judicial murder. The weight of its ghastly fruit already bows us down.”

Grenville, resolved to be firm or nothing, consulted Lord Bute as to whether it would be wise to issue orders on his own responsibility, for there was no doubt that his Majesty’s head was going. The King admitted indeed that strange buzzings and singings went on within his brain. But Lord Bute said *no*. Best to wait and see what time would bring forth.

The arrival of her Grace’s maid and courier much disconcerted Andrew Stone. If sheets were to be aired, the Duchess meant to lie in them, which was particularly provoking just now as everything was in splendid trim. Such a case as a live duchess being tried for bigamy was without precedent. Where was she to be tried—by her peers or in the ordinary way? Lord Ferrers, who shot his steward,

was treated as a common culprit, and hanged at Tyburn amongst a batch of criminals. This case was different. My Lady Grizel was a woman amongst women, a pearl of price, whose fame was clarioned all over Europe. Who were the chief witnesses for and against? The whole thing sounded like a wicked hoax, got up by enemies during the absence of the lady. His Majesty was consulted. He replied coldly that the case had better be treated as though she were a fish-fag.

“No doubt his Majesty is off his head!” said my Lord Bute in dismay. What a precedent to set. In such ticklish times! Why, it would go far towards dealing a death-blow to the aristocracy. The *première duchesse* of England too!

Having rubbed their periwigs together, the judges hoped that the matter might be postponed. It was too dangerous to skate upon such thin ice in the present condition of the social atmosphere. But Stone felt it was now or never. He had, moreover, entered into engagements with the Jews in Meadows’ name—engagements which they would of course insist upon seeing carried out to the letter. Reluctantly it was settled then that the trial should come on at once—that her Grace the Duchess of Tewkesbury should be tried in Westminster Hall before her peers in the presence of their sovereign lord the King surrounded by his court; and that, should she elect to be absent after having been served with all legal

forms, the case should go on without her. For some little time past rumours had been spreading on the subject. So soon as hints seemed to grow into facts, the already furious populace sang coarse jests about the notorious maid of honour who was no doubt everything that was abominable, a good example of aristocratic depravity. Had she not been hand and glove with “the witch”—that disgraceful royal paramour of the odious Scotch Earl? It was enough. Birds of a feather flock together. Royalty and aristocracy alike stank in the nostrils of the people. Away with them!

Meadows was rendered uneasy by what he saw and heard. Out of sheer laziness had he permitted Stone to conduct this affair. Now, at the last moment, he begged that it might be shelved, put off for a while at least. These were dreadful times! He really knew nothing of the case, save so much as Stone chose to divulge. Supposing she were to hold her own, he would be imprisoned for bringing a false charge. His friend Wilkes, the clever, the astute, was already languishing in prison. What would be his own fate, should such mischance befall him, he shuddered to think. Idol of no dangerous mob, what was to prevent his receiving such treatment as that from which he saved the Duchess’s brother? Vainly he implored Stone to think better of it; that worthy remarked only that it was too late. In truth Stone had nothing to lose in the matter except re-

venge, and that he was resolved to have somehow—whatever the result to Meadows. He had his plan but would not divulge it. Nevertheless the prospect of her Grace's unexpected presence put him out excessively. Why was she coming back? She had already proved herself to be more than a match for him. Was it not possible that even now she might turn the tables? At any cost she must be prevented from appearing. He spoke to Sim about it, who, after his recognition by my Lord Bellasis, was prepared for all extremities. Sim suggested that nothing would be simpler than to put her away. The gang, now that Scratchpole had vanished, were completely at his command. They merely had to waylay and keep her somewhere until the trial was over. At such a moment the blame for any outrage of the kind could be laid upon the coal-whippers. The idea was a good one, Stone acquiesced, and it should be acted on forthwith.

Sim Ames accordingly withdrew his men—Nim-ming Ned, Marjoram, Ted Barker, and the rest, from their orgies for the day. At first they declined to undertake the job, preferring the sacking of luxurious mansions to the kidnapping of a woman. Who was the lady in question? Their leader declined to say. If they were well paid what mattered it if she turned out to be Queen of England? A liberal sum was offered, so liberal a sum that they hesitated no more. The gang sallied forth then, amusing

themselves by scratching 45 upon cottage doors, and occupied a copse conveniently situated at a solitary turn of the way.

All day they waited, grumbling and blowing their frozen fingers, while Stone was a prey to alternating hopes and terrors. What if she had taken another road and should so escape him? No. She would naturally travel with all speed, and this was the shortest route. Hours passed. Tree-shadows lengthened on the frosted grass. The sun rose in the heavens, then descended, cosily sinking into a feather bed of fleecy clouds. Where was she stopping on the road? Surely she was not so foolish as to dally by the way. Yet with one so careless who might account for the eccentricities of her vagaries? The trial was to take place in two days' time. What if the cunning lady had planned to appear suddenly in court and confound him by some unexpected trick? If she did not come up shortly Stone felt that the kidnapping plan must be abandoned. The men, who early in the day growled to themselves, were by this time grumbling openly. There would be no inducing them to sacrifice another day of plunder.

Hark! Carriage wheels upon the iron-bound road. At last! The gang mounted their horses and stood ready to dash over the hedge. A whisky on high wheels, a boy-postilion riding, two women tightly muffled, both of them wearing travelling

masks. There was no mistaking that stately figure even in its wraps, although, for disguise' sake probably, she elected to travel in that queer machine. At a word sharply given the six horsemen leapt into the road, and, circling round the carriage, bade the trembling boy to stop. Miss Bate cowered shrieking under the apron, her companion drew two dainty toy-pistols from a belt, murmuring "Hold your silly tongue, you fool!"

"Let me pass," she cried, rising in her flowing draperies, "or it will be the worse for you." Then flinging off her mask, "Let me pass, I say; I am the Duchess of Tewkesbury, and not to be trifled with."

The foreign junketing had apparently increased her beauty. Those finely-chiselled lineaments, despair of serene highnesses, were acquiring a new mellowed dignity as the bloom of youth departed. Even Stone could not withhold a murmur of admiration as she drew herself up to her full imperial height, and calmly commanded the boy to proceed.

"I am the Duchess of Tewkesbury," she repeated.

"And I am Andrew Stone, madam," retorted the latter with a sneer, "whom possibly you may remember, though the memories of the great are singularly short. Put up your irons, Countess Bellasis! Your playthings affright me not. Surround the carriage, men. One of you change places with that shivering idiot. Away!"

The Duchess lost countenance and lowered her

pistols. It was the first time she had ever been thus openly styled Countess Bellasis. She sat quietly down prepared to succumb meekly to her fate. Anagke, at whom she had dared to snap her fair fingers, was on her track. Who might resist the implacable goddess? The sword of Damocles was spinning over her head, so close that she discerned the thinness of the cord. Stone was surprised and suspicious of so prompt a surrender.

But as suddenly as the collapse came a reaction. The Duchess's quick ears did not deceive her. Her brother and only friend could not be far. He was nearer than she thought, for, discerning from a piece of rising ground the whisky surrounded by men, he dashed across the fields, between which meandered the winding road, and, bursting through crackling branches, appeared quickly in their midst.

“Jasper!” ejaculated Sim uneasily.

“Scratchpole!” shouted Nimming Ned with a huzza.

“Never heed him, men!” cried Stone in wild excitement. “I'll double the reward—treble it—if you make haste. Quick! mount and away.”

But the men never stirred.

“This is my dearly-loved sister, mates,” Jasper said calmly. “Ye knew it not, I know, or not one among you would have threatened a hair upon her head. In her name I thank you. Yes, mount and

away. For my sake ye will escort us in safety to Mary le Bone."

He spoke with the assurance of one who knows his men and can gauge the extent of his influence. He did not command, but merely took it for granted that the whole thing was a mistake, which happily he was in time to rectify. His haggard face effectually concealed his thoughts. Sim was an enemy then—a seeming friend who waged war against him when his back was turned. This was no time for quarrelling. The presence of Stone he ignored altogether. Sim, stung by his contemptuous manner, turned to the gang in anger :

"I am your captain now, mates," he shouted. "To me ye owe obedience. How has Scratchpole treated you? Has he led you on during these last glorious days? He made an attack upon a prison, and, failing, fled away discomfited. A pretty leader, truly!"

"Scratchpole is our leader. Him we will obey," returned Nimming Ned with decision. "It is ill work trapping simple women. The gold of this man stinketh. What say you, mates? Shall we give it back? Scratchpole will lead us to-morrow. There are hundreds of great houses yet unburnt, whose wealth shall enrich each man among us."

The band gave an unanimous huzza. Sim scowled upon them. Stone gnashed his teeth in impotent wrath.

“Go!” Jasper said; “and do your worst. Her Grace shall appear to answer and refute your charge.”

Stone looked on the Duchess with an evil smile.

“Good-morrow, till we meet again, my Lady Bellasis,” he said. “As you will drive through town, I would recommend you to change your patches. The Wilkites wear patches on the left cheek only. A happy deliverance, madam. Adieu!” As he drew up his reins, he flung at Jasper, with a flash of baffled hate, the one word “Bastard!” then, spurring his horse, he galloped away with his ally Sim Ames, while the rest of the party made for Tewkesbury House.



CHAPTER XI.

MAY THE ORDEAL BE ESCAPED ?



HANKS to her buoyant disposition, the Duchess again snapped her fingers at Anagke, who was but a foolish opponent after all ; and looked out with child-like interest at the strange condition of the streets through which she passed, on her way to Mary le Bone. On all sides were vestiges of recent rioting. No one was abroad save those who were forced to quit their homes on business. Those whose affairs compelled them to leave their houses after nightfall flitted as quickly as might be, retiring into dark archways or corners on the approach of a knot of men, then, the party past, speeding more swiftly than ever on their way. No lamps were lighted, no watchmen were about, no one shouted a monotonous chant anent the hour and the starlight. Whole streets were empty, deserted, dark, shut up ; others, on the other hand

blazed with light from end to end, a roysterer party having ordered an illumination as it stumbled and swung along. By twos and threes houses were burnt black and gutted, looking like some hollow tooth in the midst of a comely row. Signs lay in heaps, bereft of swinging-irons, for such pieces of metal formed admirable weapons, either for prising open doors and chests, or for battering in of brains. Other houses, again, were gutted but not burnt. Doors and shutters flapped idly on their hinges, each labelled with the popular number ; shattered cupboards, boxes, drawers choked window and passage, disgorging for the benefit of secret prowlers the goods which the rush of rioters had not deemed worthy of removal. Now and again came wafted on the evening breeze sounds of noisy mirth, clinking of glasses, followed ofttimes by howls and cursing and the thud of blows—or more positive signs of fighting—of clashing swords and cries for help, where some one who was wicked enough to own a chair and a velvet coat was being set upon and belaboured by an indignant populace.

The whisky arrived before the great gates, and was not admitted by the marvelling servitor until he had reconnoitred it from sundry peepholes, and was with difficulty made to understand that indeed it contained his mistress. It behoved him to be mighty cautious as times went. Many a passing mob had paused before Tewkesbury House and

then moved on again, repelled by its frowning exterior, which resembled from without, so blank and windowless was its aspect, a fortress or a citadel. Many a time had the startled porter turned in his bed, then breathed a prayer of thankfulness as the patter of feet and hum of drunken voices died away in the distance. It was a grievous responsibility to keep the house, its mistress absent, while other buildings were hourly being sacked, especially when a remote room contained a woman who was to be watched and fed and locked up as though she were a maniac or a wild beast.

The Duchess was surprised when she went up to visit Deborah. She was in a frantic mood, wringing of her hands, behaving like a caged animal, calling down curses on the family of Gowering. Even the sight of her late mistress seemed to produce no soothing. To all that her Grace said she only answered doggedly :

“ Set me free ; set me free ; then see how I shall act.”

At length the Duchess lost her temper, and banged out of the room, saying :

“ Fiddlededee ! I hold you and will keep you locked up till I return from this foolish trial, since you will make no promise. It is your own fault. Lie in your bed as you have made it.”

The Duchess was vexed, and descended to her boudoir, there to consult with Jasper. He was not

so sanguine as his sister, for he could not believe that either Stone or Meadows would have stirred up the King and the peerage to try so great a lady on a criminal charge, without some masked batteries to turn on her. He told her so again and again, but she only laughed. At length, placing her large white hand fondly about his neck, she kissed him, saying :

“ It is late. We will have a glass of Madeira and go to bed. To-morrow I will visit the Princess Dowager, who shall quash this preposterous nonsense, and so make an end of it.”

True to her word, next day she entered a plain chair with no armorial bearings on it (the chair that the old Duke had used when on amorous expeditions bent), and ordered herself to be carried to the palace of her Highness. It was a matter of no small risk to be carried thither at all, but once arrived, there was need of much parleying to obtain admittance. Her royal Highness was actually in a state of siege. Every window on the front of the mansion was smashed and boarded up. Dark circles of defunct bonfires marked the roadway in front of it; for one body or another of rioters was never weary of bringing the boot and petticoat, which fluttered before them as a banner, and sacrificing them to the flames with dances and cheers under the very nose of the King’s mother. The poor lady never slept, save by snatches, during the several weeks that the riots lasted. Every window being closed and barri-

cadoed, she remained enveloped in perpetual night, her chamber illumined by wax tapers.

It was in no angelic temper, therefore, that she received her quondam maid of honour, who looked so provokingly fresh and lovely as to exasperate her still further. My Lord Bute, for a glimpse of whose leg she languished, never came near her, and she was bound to confess to her aching heart that he was right. He dared not go forth now even in a cloak and red bobwig. The mob would have torn him to pieces. Indeed, she knew that her thoroughfare was watched, in hopes of the turtledove coming to coo. Tears coursed down her poor old face when she contemplated the possibility of seeing the adored Scot dragged piecemeal before her eyes—such limbs to be torn one from the other! Such a lovely leg! The vision was too horrible even for nightmare.

Grimly, with her chin resting on her two hands and her eyes blinking at the new comer, she listened to her tale. The charge was true the Duchess owned, but could not be proven. She did not stop to defend herself. Suffice it that circumstances over which she had no control, etc. For the sake of the peerage, at a moment when the nobles were in evil odour, such a scandal must not take place. Of course she would obtain a verdict. It was purely in the interests of her order that she begged the Princess to interfere.

The Princess was not shocked. *Son Altesse en avait vu bien d'autres!* She only, reflecting on her own case, thought how exceedingly stupid it was to marry two men, when she herself—well, well, some people have prejudices, whilst others have not.

“My childe, what may I do?” she asked sweetly.

“Go to the King,” responded her Grace promptly. “Point out to his Majesty that this is a case for the exercise of his prerogative.” Cunning Duchess! to employ the Scotch Earl’s favourite word. “Show him (strange that he should not perceive it for himself, but he is a mere boy) that he must stand by his aristocracy if he expects them to stand by him. Tell him——”

The Princess shook her head, while vinegar permeated her blue blood.

“Ich darf nicht, meine Liebe!” she murmured with the hushed music of a mountain rill. “I hold no influence mit seine Majestät. He hate me, his mother—allows me to be *outragé par la canaille*. We are estranged, hélas! and you, my loafe, did it!”

“I!” cried the Duchess, taken aback. “Why, for years and years I slaved for you. But for me the lad would have married his Sarah. But for me Stone would have had his way. You owe me sufficient, ma’am, I think, to be no whit surprised at my *demanding* a little help in turn. I estranged you! I!”

“Yes, you. He might have had his Sarah,

maybe, but he could not hate his old mother as he does. *Mon enfant ne me regarde plus !* He loathe me. *Et je l'adore toujours, ce bébé là !* Midout your counsels I should have given way. I should have submitted myself and been happy. Thanks to you, a gulf lies between his mama and her poy. I have no influence. You are yourself de cause. *I will pray for you, my loafe, but can do no more !*"

The Duchess was so overwhelmed with indignation at the cold-blooded ingratitude of her for whom she had wormed and worked that she sat speechless.

"Pray for me indeed ! Thank you for nothing," she said at last, and whisked out of the room. On the stairs she met pale Lady Gladys moving upwards thoughtfully. The Duchess held out her hand. Lady Gladys recoiled against the wall, while the grinning Princess laughed mockingly on the upper landing. "Won't you shake hands ?" implored the Duchess, who felt a chill settling on her heart, consequent upon a turning of old friends' backs on her.

Lady Gladys hid her hands in the folds of her mantle.

"Lord Bellasis is sorely wounded, and may die," she said. "Surely you should go to him ! It is your duty !"

Lord Bellasis—always Lord Bellasis ! The prim little prig whose shadow darkened her life. How she had struggled and fought against him ! Should

not unwearying courage count for something ? Lord Bellasis dying ! Another strand broken. She had intended, written proofs not being forthcoming, to call on Lord Bellasis as a gentleman to perjure himself for the sake of the woman he had injured. Such reparation she had a right to demand. She would have brought him forward at her trial to swear by the Four Gospels that she was never more to him than an acquaintance. Lord Bellasis dying ! This was the first she heard of it. She felt lonely. What could be done ? The trial was to commence upon the morrow. She would go to St. James's and see the King himself. He used to be a sensible lad, if dull. He certainly must have sense enough to perceive the force of her arguments. As she entered her chair she heard the Princess screaming shrilly from the landing : “Let not de hussy enter dis haus again ! Dey are my orders !” What is there more bitter to endure than ingratitude ? What other crime makes us so hate the world and all upon its surface ? Filled with a nameless terror her Grace cried to the chairmen to hurry, and began, she knew not why, to feel very desolate.

Since the episode which ended with Wilkes's arrest, St. James's was also in a state of siege. Bayonets bristled within the courtyard ; red coats gleamed through basement windows ; caps bearing the white horse of Hanover were as plentiful as mushrooms at Epping. Chargers fully equipped

were tethered in rows up St. James's Street; his Majesty reposed little trust in his faithful Londoners. The modest sedan was challenged by a sentry. "Call the officer of the guard!" A downy-skinned gentleman tripped daintily up, whose chin and nose were white with bismuth, while his cheeks were daubed with rouge. At sight of the celebrated toast he bowed and faltered. The Duchess of Tewkesbury! Whose health he had so often drunk in taverns! For an invitation to whose galas and ridottos he had so often languished in vain! In what way could he serve her Grace? He, the meanest of her innumerable abject slaves?

The homage even of this painted lad was a comfort.

"Thanks! thanks!" she answered quite gratefully. "I must see his Majesty at once."

The officer's face fell. If his Majesty could see any one, no doubt he would gladly see her Grace. But his Majesty was grievously sick—an attack of nerves—and was husbanding his strength for—Here the poor boy stammered awkwardly, but the lady understood him.

"He is preparing to attend my trial. I know it. It is concerning that I am here to speak with him. A victim of infamous plots, I must and will see the King."

Emerging from her chair, the sturdy Duchess walked into the courtyard, leaving the officer a prey to admiration and sorrowful delight. He had

touched her hand. Her breath had fanned his cheek. Of course she was a victim of infamous plots. He vowed she was the loveliest creature upon earth. Indeed she was so to many, and the more to him, in that he was of the age which burns with unquenchable fire for sirens who are at least twelve years older than itself.

The royal servants inclined their heads; she sailed up the staircase, upon whose summit stood the Lady Sarah. If Lady Gladys had looked pale and pinched, her sister was a perambulating corpse. The roguish eyes were dimmed with weeping. She looked too ill and listless to break into tantrums as of yore. Without replying to any questions, she led the way through several saloons, and opening a door curtseyed gravely and retired.

The Duchess entered the King's cabinet, where he was crouching over a wood fire, while the Queen rattled artless German tunes on her spinette. What a melancholy couple! thought her Grace as she too curtseyed. Indeed, the King did appear very ill. Now and then he pressed his clammy fingers to his brow as if to sweep something thence, then moaned and wept.

“The darkness! the darkness!” he kept muttering. “It surges over me, and I am going mad! Oh, my God, if in mercy I might die. What shall I do? What shall I do?”

The Queen closed her instrument with a sigh,

then taking his wandering fingers in hers, stooped down and kissed him. She frowned slightly when she perceived her visitor, but stood quietly before her lord to hear what she wished to say.

“I arrived in England only yesterday,” she said, “and have come at once to offer my condolences to his Majesty.”

“We thank you,” returned the young Queen with dignity.

“I would also speak to his Majesty a few words in private. As an old friend who nursed him I may claim as much.”

“His Majesty is ill,” answered the Queen. “By order of the physicians he must be kept quiet.”

This was a contingency of which the Duchess never dreamed. Herself and Mr. Pitt and the Princess Dowager had married the boy to an ugly duckling, with a figure like a box, for state reasons. Of course he would hate that duckling and relegate her to apartments of her own—would howl over his lost love who loved him hopelessly—and be miserable for ever for his country’s sake. Not a bit of it. He appeared miserable enough certainly, but from another cause. He and his young wife were actually mingling tears together, like an old couple who had borne life’s travail together! It would be impossible—the humiliation would be too great—to speak of her own affairs before this chit. And yet no time was to be lost. By a clever flank movement

she got behind the Queen, and sinking on her knees covered the King's fevered hand with kisses.

“Would that I might die!” he wailed. “My will loses the power to restrain my intellect. Darkness approaches when I shall no longer be master of myself. It shrouds me in its folds. What horror can equal that?” Then observing that some one bent before him, he looked down and started as though it had been a serpent. The firm hands of the Duchess held his as in a vice. Her strong will conquered his. He stammered and writhed, then sank down gnawing his kerchief between his teeth.

“I must speak to you, sir, alone for a brief space,” she whispered with decision. “Five minutes will find you free again.”

His Majesty bit the cambric, then rolled it in his hands irresolute; then motioned to the Queen to withdraw. She withdrew into the embrasure of a window whence she could see without hearing. Her Grace's position was a most unpleasant one. Every one seemed now to be throwing obstacles in her path. How different from the time—only a month or two ago—when she ruled supreme—when her lightest caprice was law. Was this the shadow of the impending sword? She roused her numbing faculties.

“Are you happy, sir?” she said idly, merely from the necessity of saying something, and a foreboding that her quest was vain.

The King winced. "I am on the threshold of the unknown," he replied sombrely. "Death to the young is terrible. How much more awful is death in life! Those whose burthens are too crushing in this world will in the next be treated leniently. Will they not? Hey? I am barely yet a man, and I cry out already for rest in the grave. The spectacle before you should soften even your hard heart, Duchess!"

"Mine!" cried her Grace. "Were people wilfully uniting to charge her with every enormity?"

"I know why you are here. You ask if I am happy? With my country bleeding at every pore how could I be happy? Though my mind plays me false and my memory slumbers fitfully, yet I know why you are here. But for the state of this most wretched land I should be almost happy. My love for her you tore from me is past. At least, I think it is. The wound is cicatrised—or is it but the merciful stupor of pain deadened by its own intensity? My people! 'Tis they who are driving me to madness. All my motives are consistently misunderstood. I am accused of immuring the Queen in a cloister because we both prefer the lovely privacy of a simple life to the vain turmoil of a wicked world. Is this a sin? What one may be justified in doing, in another is a crime!" Tears were coursing down the King's cheeks. The Queen advanced and wiped them carefully away. His Majesty, pressing his brows to coerce his vagrant thoughts, proceeded

without heeding her. “I know why you are here. But you come in vain. I prayed once in my bitterness that a day might come when *you* would implore *me* as I did you. You were without pity then! so am I now. I will not move one finger in your behalf. If you have indeed sinned as rumour saith, then may you be forgiven. *God grant you a good deliverance.*”

Again that legal formula which would be said tomorrow by the usher of the court! It struck like a knell upon her heart. His Majesty’s eyes were closed and he turned from her, caressing the Queen’s hand with his moist fingers. She looked from one to the other. There was a secret between them which she could not unriddle. The King’s pulse was rising, his cheek wore a hectic spot. The Queen peremptorily motioned the suppliant from her knees. Slowly the Duchess rose, and marvelling if this could be the girl whom she amused herself by frightening when first she crossed from Germany, went slowly away to where the plain chair waited. As it struck her eye it seemed an omen. Its panels bore no cognisance. Did it not seem as though those panels were inquiring whether ultimately they were to bear a duke’s coronet or an earl’s? The listless eyes of Lady Sarah watched her as she entered it. There was something of gratified malevolence in the expression of those eyes. She had ushered her without orders into the royal presence, knowing full well that she would receive a rebuff. She too! Every one!

The Duchess shook herself like a bird whose wings are weighed down with rain, while she adjusted a mask over her face. This was childish—morbid—absurd! Had she not washed in the world's stream long enough to know how muddy were its waters? Ingratitude—implication of false motive—malice—envy—hatred. Are we not doomed to meet with them every day? Do not people whose hearts are smaller than our own, whose views are enclosed within a narrower circle, daily insist upon labelling our acts—acts which are Hebrew to them—with every motive that is disgraceful as a gentle titillation of their own malicious wickedness? He who will get on must borrow no man's crutches lest peradventure the lender may have sawn them half through before he lent them. The Duchess was no longer inclined to laugh over her trial. It must be gone through. The brunt must be borne; the unpleasant scandalous brunt; the ordeal which royalty might have saved her. It would be unpleasant to stand in a dock, even though it were hung with red silk in honour of a peeress. Yet there was a bright side to the picture too. Of course all her enemies would be there *en masse*—snakes which the sun of her social success had hatched into life. The women who could not forgive her beauty, the others who could not forgive her taste, the others who could not forgive her wealth, and so on to the end of the devil's chapter. She would stand forth before them all in

widow's weeds backed by the venerable stones of Westminster Hall—the fairest woman in all England—aye ! the richest, the most successful, the most triumphant. For of course she would gain the day. There was no doubt of it. They would hide their diminished heads and gnash their teeth. She would tread them under her high wooden heel, and ask them all to the most splendid *fêtes* which ingenuity could devise. They would gaze at her magnificence and hate her—and she would laugh at them. What better revenge than that ?

While the chair jolted homewards she marvelled about the King and his young wife. Absolutely they seemed to like each other, and Sarah abode with them. The strangest *ménage* ! And what a fright the poor thing was. No doubt it was a judgment that her body should be like a box—a punishment of a third generation for the sins of its grandfathers according to stern Jewish dogma. What a horrible dogma, and what a shocking figure ! Really a woful and most lamentable figure. By the time she reached Tewkesbury House, where Jasper was waiting anxiously, the careless lady had forgotten her own troubles in commiseration for a woman who was doomed to carry about a body like a box during all her life—such a body—such a box !

Recalled to herself by his inquiries, she was fain to admit that, like most people who are temporarily under a cloud, she had enjoyed an arctic amount of

cold shoulder. What was to be done? Nothing. The ordeal must be passed through—an ordeal like a genteel pillory.

Jasper drummed for a while with his feet and bit his nails to the quick. "I must go and see Meadows," he resolved at length. "The case must be compromised at whatever price—even a third of your income."

The Duchess shrugged her entrancing shoulders. Jasper might settle the business as he deemed best. She left it in his hands, and took a pinch of snuff.



CHAPTER XII.

THE DUCHESS LEAVES TEWKESBURY HOUSE.

DEEPEST apprehensions pervaded the respectable portion of society which remained in town. Were honest citizens to be slaughtered in their homes, to have their roofs burned over their heads, by the rabble ? and were King and Government to sit idly looking on ? The question was no longer whether Whig or Tory should have the upper hand, but whether the laws or the mob should decide men's lives and liberties. Here were those whose cry was “Liberty !” setting scornfully at defiance decrees, by respecting which alone the safety of a body politic may be secured. Letters appeared in the *Daily Advertiser* blaming his Majesty's apathy ; calling on citizens to unite in mutual defence, for it was not, as heretofore, the exorbitant power of the Throne, but of the many-headed monster crowned

with a weathercock, yclept the populace, which was to be dreaded. Deputations waited on Mr. Grenville imploring him to call out the troops, but the minister answered with vague smiles that his Majesty would not consent to wilful bloodshed, resolving in his own mind, however, that if the King went on much longer as he was doing, he must be shut up, and the orb of authority wrested from his hands.

Mr. Grenville was quite of opinion that, under the circumstances, a public washing of aristocratic linen was deplorably unwise. What more suicidal than to air the unclean secrets of a ducal house, precisely at a time when the lower orders were up in arms against the nobles? Shortly after the Duchess left St. James's Mr. Grenville was carried thither, in order to advise the King once more to use his prerogative in the matter of this trial. Though it was not in his power to quash the case openly, he could order it to be postponed, and it is wonderful how time will unravel difficult knots! But his Majesty was obstinate, wherein he was abetted by the Queen; and the minister departed as unsuccessful as had been her Grace, resolved to communicate with the commander-in-chief forthwith for the keeping of the peace. Indeed, it did seem high time that something should be done, unless universal anarchy were to reign unchecked. The foolish antics of the bat had kindled this conflagration. It was apparent that decisive measures would

be necessary for the quenching of it. Mr. Grenville already half regretted his general warrant, just as already he had quite repented of the *auto-da-fé* at Cripplegate. If Wilkes had been paraded in a *san benito* the people could not have appeared more frantic. Silly creatures, so furiously to roar against a benignant minister ! It did seem stupid, even to the veiled intelligence of the bat, that London should lie at the mercy of a rabblement in consequence of a pother as to the burning of a scrap of paper ! The warning of the Great Commoner echoed in his ears. It might have been wiser to have left Wilkes alone, for the enthusiasm of his friends carried them to strange lengths. Everything connected with his mystic number was all at once become sacred. A “Forty-five Club” was started by democratic bloods, whereat Forty-five guests were to dine together once a week for the discussing of Forty-five venison pasties by the light of Forty-five candles. Forty-five toasts were to be drunk, concluding always with the sentiment, “Oblivion to general warrants, and damn those who forged them !”

Another batch of admirers purchased a monster turtle weighing one hundred and forty-five pounds, which was carried to the Tower preceded by drums and fifes ; while a third, not to be outdone, determined to seize the forty-fifth number in a certain sale as a present to their idol. Unfortunately for all concerned, this turned out to be a huge copper

weighing seven thousand pounds, on one side of which the mystic number was carefully engraven before being dragged by Flemish horses to the gates of the ancient citadel. So big was this culinary white elephant, that posts, pent-houses, and signs had to be torn away before the unwieldy machine could pass. It arrived at last, like the big helmet in the Castle of Otranto—every whit as cumbersome and uncomfortable a gift; and Mr. Wilkes (uncoloneled now by express orders of the King) declared, as bowing he pointed his toe upon the leads, that just such a copper was the thing above all others which he had ever longed to possess. The mob laughed at the conceit, and huzzaed the merry martyr, then straggled away in bands, as was become its wont, to smash windows and gut houses in honour of the patriot.

The sailors had by this time returned to their allegiance, soothed by shadowy promises of reform. But a force more powerful for evil than they were had risen to fill their place, in the persons of the weavers, hitherto quiescent. Sir John Fielding was right when he foreboded danger from them. All they demanded was redress of grievances—a means of filling the gaping mouths of wives and little ones. Vainly they sat in their camp week after week. So long as they were tranquil no one heeded them or their sorrows. On the other hand, people fled at the mere sight of coal-whippers with their blue

cockades, for those rags of silk were emblems of rapine, outrage, murder. The chiefs among the weavers began to realise that without the notoriety of violence no end would be gained. Water curbed gains the greater force by its temporary retention. Out of work, the weavers speedily became themselves a prey to hunger, whilst they watched their dear ones perishing before their eyes. Such a sight was not to be endured with calmness. Around the midnight bonfires earnest councils were held, as to the best means of putting a period to their dreadful condition. The coal-heavers were sacking the town. They, the weavers, in order to enforce respect, must even do likewise. But as their hearts were the more full of bitterness, they adopted a blood-red cockade in lieu of a blue one, and sallied forth—gaunt, famished, shrunken-chested, lanthorn-jawed images of retribution for the scourging of aristocratic *insouciance* and vice. They went forth in companies a hundred strong, headed by women bearing flags made of French silk, adorned with fluttering odds and ends of foreign lace. There was no howling, no reeling drunkenness within their ranks. Their children away in the camp at Southwark were starving because fashion chose to proscribe the work of English looms. The leaders of fashion must be forced to beg for mercy. Woe—woe to them and to their offspring !

Our friend Mr. Andrew Stone was carefully watch-

ing the constantly changing signs of the times. The sailors, having served their purpose, were relegated like worn-out puppets to their box. Out with another batch of dolls. By means of his agents, for he knew better than to show in person, he pointed out to the angry weavers which among the great dames were most addicted to the employ of foreign merchandise. Unaccountably they became informed that her frolicsome Grace of Ancaster harboured three French dressers and as many friseurs within the walls of Ancaster House—which friseurs were more than suspected of being smugglers. Certain it was (though how they knew it none could say) that the Duchess procured at a cheap rate French gloves and gauzes for the behoof of Miss Ashe and other impoverished friends. A pernicious system, so disastrous to British trade, must be struck at the root. It would be a fine example for modish city madams if the mantua-makers of an erring Duchess were sent packing by force; their goods destroyed piecemeal under her very nose. Accordingly a large and orderly assemblage was stealthily gathering round the lively lady's dwelling about the time when our other Duchess was being carried out of St. James's Palace. Now Ancaster House lay, as we know, on the direct route to Mary le Bone, and had her Grace of Tewkesbury appeared of a sudden amongst the exasperated mechanics it is probable that our chronicle would have come to an

abrupt conclusion ; for her name, too, was on Stone's black list, accompanied (as we may well guess) by special instructions, unless we misjudge her enemy grossly. A flying knot of terrified domestics informed her chairmen of what was going on ; so, doubling back under cover of the thorn-hedges, they managed thus to land their charge in safety within the frowning walls of the home of the Tewkesburys.

When her Grace came back from her expedition Jasper started on his. He took his hat and clouded cane and walked out with a determination of finding Meadows, convinced that his sister's foes must be keeping mysterious poisoned arrows in the back-ground. Is it not often thus ? Do we not, goaded by our fears, frequently take that for a deeply-laid plot which is only the outcome of mere malice ; do we not oft-times give our opponents credit for a knowledge of details which they do not dream of, forgetting that prompted by hate mortals will do things haphazard, knowing that their efforts alone will at least cause deep and satisfactory annoyance ? It is doubtful whether Stone at any moment saw clearly to the end of the vista he had opened. Until she shut him up he allowed her Grace to be more or less at peace. When he came out of durance boiling with a sense of injury, the weapons he would gladly have used had been moved beyond his grasp, and so he was fain to gnaw his nails in impotent wrath. Then, with the episode of the will, came an idea

that it might really be possible to upset the Duchess ; an idea which remained after the hope had crumbled. Upon his discovery of Deborah in a state of exasperation, the hope grew again. Something might certainly be done through her means seriously to injure her Grace. Her declaration and his own, and that which he would endeavour to wring from Lady Gladys, would at least be ample excuse for having raked up the ugly past. If no marriage could legally be proven, at least he would have shown that there were sufficiently grave suspicions of some such ceremony having taken place ; and that much accomplished as a pure matter of revenge, he was prepared, if necessary, to leave Meadows in the lurch to get out of the scrape as he best might.

So much Stone saw as in a glass darkly ; yet was he not without a hope that as one thing suggests another, so something might arise, which he could not see at present, to aid in the completion of his triumph. Meadows was a charming catspaw. If he, Stone, who had apparently no interest in the matter, were to come forward and prefer a wild charge against a great lady, it is probable that he might be politely advised to mind his business ; but in the case of an heir-at-law, who, by making the charge, claimed the transfer of a large fortune, the matter assumed quite another complexion. The charge of the heir-at-law would have to be investigated, and it would be the worse for him if that

charge turned out to be idle and frivolous. This much was clear to the mind of Mr. Stone. If a sweeter revenge than mere annoyance could be gained by the prosecution of the charge, then he would come forward saying, “ You owe all to me. Give me your eternal gratitude.” If, on the other hand, things went ill, he was quite resolved to wriggle out of any connection with the affair, and abandon Meadows to the result of his own foolishness.

Jasper became more and more nervous about his sister, the more he thought the matter out. What a fall for her if really her enemies held proofs ! How dreadful was it even that suspicions should be roused ! How terribly wise was the old saw about sleeping dogs ! Far better a compromise—any sacrifice—than to run a risk. He sought out Meadows therefore, determined to buy his sister’s peace at any price. Meadows, the lethargic and kindhearted, could surely be persuaded, for a consideration, to withdraw from the case ; could be induced perhaps to vanish altogether till this nonsense were forgotten. But Jasper, in his calculations, forgot the existence of Stone—of the clever, cold, spiteful man—who traced the withering of a promising career to the machinations of my Lady Grizel. Stone had foreseen that Meadows might be tampered with, and that unless kept in order he would yield to the persuasions of the last speaker. Therefore Stone kept Meadows, muzzled with liquor, caged in the Feathers

at Cripplegate, which was outside the burning circle of the riots, and Jasper sought for him in vain.

Returning dissatisfied to tell his sister that the ordeal must be borne, that she must even press upon her brow the crown of thorns woven through her own folly, he passed within fifty yards of Ancaster House. The prospect rendered his haggard face even more sad than usual. A vast orderly concourse had sat down about it with a dull steadiness of purpose which was alarming. Nobody shouted or danced. The wearers of the red cockade were too famished for such foolery. The heart of the man who had himself suffered so much went out to them. Their hatred of the nobles was as intense as his was for those who had wrecked him. They were prepared to wreak vengeance on patrician palaces just as he burned to batter down the Fleet ruthlessly, brick by brick. He could appreciate their motives and feelings as few others could—for were they not like him weighed down by serried ranks of unmerited wrongs? He stood and watched them as they carefully trimmed and polished such arms as they possessed—rusty knives, staves, heavy pieces taken from looms unused. With a deliberation that was horrible, they, at a signal given, tore down the ornamental wooden palisades with which the lively Duchess had fenced her home about—an uncomely barrier of carved rococo crosswork beset at every angle with a coronet. They quietly pulled down

the palisade and made a fire of its fragments. In the expression of their hollow eyes he saw that in due course the entire mansion would be sacked and burnt. It suited the savage humour of these oppressed weavers to go about their work deliberately. Jasper observed that the shutters were tightly closed and loopholed. The Duke, warned in time, had summoned his intimates to his assistance. A sea of desperate wretches surged about his gates. Little help could be expected from the military. Well ! if they dared to attack his palace, he and his friends would at least give them a warm reception.

Jasper hurried homeward filled with chill forebodings. Dangers in cohorts were gathering around his sister. Her trial, which was fixed for the morrow, would draw all eyes towards her at a time when the notorious were trying to efface themselves. A war was to be waged between the weavers and the leaders of fashion. Would not the former pour their tardy vengeance upon the acknowledged queen of fashion, more especially when she was upraised on the pillory of a more or less disgraceful scandal ? The Duchess of Tewkesbury had, during her career, shown little prudence, and from her position at court she had been as it were before the public almost from childhood. If the Duchess of Ancaster, who was quite a little social light, were marked out for punishment, it was idle to suppose that the greater luminary would escape scot-free. Everybody knew

the hour fixed for the trial. Might not the enemy maltreat her on the road ? What could a few servants do against a crowd ? Distracted by many fears, Jasper frightened Mr. Grenville well-nigh into a fit by loudly knocking at his door after night-fall. He laid the whole case clearly before the minister, who was relieved in his mind as to this at least. His favourite general warrant could not be accused of brewing this new difficulty. The weavers did not wear Wilkes's cognisance. They professed no interest in 45 or the "Essay on Woman." Oh, human bat, whose eyesight was too dim to follow the sequence of things ; who failed to perceive that the weavers would never have risen alone ; that their present tactics were in servile imitation of those for which the general warrant was directly responsible. Jasper knew this well, and hotly charged the minister with his responsibility.

"If either of the two Duchesses receives injury," he said, "they will have to thank you for it. If my sister to-morrow is torn to pieces by the mob, you will be her executioner ! I demand troops to conduct her to Westminster, and to protect her house until popular clamour is assuaged."

With this he departed, leaving Mr. Grenville much perplexed. Truly chaos was come again—possibly through his own fault. Oh for the help of Mr. Pitt's clear judgment in this crisis ! But Mr. Pitt was hovering on the confines of two worlds..

The golden gate stood ajar. Little recked he now of the petty boiling of foul human passions in this ignoble caldron, London. What a state of things ! When a bastard, reckless breaker of every law, human and divine, could quietly beard a chief minister in his home and dub him executioner ! The worst of it all was, the reprobate spoke truth. The Duchess of Tewkesbury might be dragged from her chair and murdered by these savages. Europe was already looking on the decadence of England with amused surprise. What if, within half-a-dozen years or so of the acme of her greatness, she should have fallen so low as to need foreign help for the suppression of internecine broils ? Mr. Grenville groaned in spirit with beatings of the breast, for his sins, which were of omission, grieved him. He was not wicked, merely bat-like. It did seem hard that when he ardently desired to wash out his mistake by displaying decision of character, the King should stand in his way. The King's behaviour grew daily stranger and more strange. He was wrong sulkily to avoid his people ; he was wrong to assume the attributes of a Grand Llama ; he was doubly wrong to allow riot to rage instead of quenching it by timely severity. Bloodshed indeed ! A few lives sacrificed and the hideous debauch would be over. Permitted to proceed unchecked, who might tell how many lives would be lost ere uproar gave place to order ? During the watches of that night the Duke

of Ancaster and his friends sat quite still, musket in hand, awaiting an attack. Jasper wandered hither and thither through the empty reception-rooms of the adjacent mansion racked by anxiety, uncertain what step to take next. My Lady Grizel, under a feathery canopy, slept the sweet unruffled sleep of babes and of the just. Mr. Grenville moaned and grumbled, until at dawn becoming desperate, he sent for the Marquis of Granby and bade him to make ready all available troops, despite his Majesty.

“I really am acting for the best, contrary to my own interests,” said the hapless minister. “This plaguey Duchess must be protected, you know; so must the King; even if later he demands my resignation.”

What was Jasper’s joy, just as the sun was painting the floors of Tewkesbury with heraldic pictures from the window-glass, when a company of a Scotch regiment of guards marched into the courtyard, whilst a second drew up outside as escort; and a troop of light horse clattered down the central avenue among the groves and flower-beds behind. The day was come; the egregious farce had to be gone through; her Grace must perforce show herself at Westminster.

She was a distracting vision of beauteous innocence as she descended the grand marble staircase in her robes, followed at a little distance by quivering Miss Bate. The sun mellowed the Carrara stone

to cream-colour. Priceless Greek statues looked down from gilded niches as she passed ; her own towering figure as Zenobia all in chains (the magnum opus of Mr. Nollekens) stared in dumb stony grief at her. Sumptuous gold-fringed webs from the far East glittered with rainbow-hues under her feet. Choice exotics (lovingly reared in the vast hot-houses) and immense ferns rose in slender loveliness from antique vases at intervals upon the balustrade. All was rich harmony of colour subdued and chastened by a taste which was exquisite and Argus-eyed. A rich setting which became a gorgeous jewel. Down the grand staircase proudly swam her Grace, clad in the becoming sables of widowhood, leaning on the arm of her brother who was also dressed in black. She who was to be tried that day by her peers on a criminal charge had slept the sleep of babes, and looked resplendently fair in consequence.

“Kiss me, brother,” she said as she stepped into the plain chair, which prudence counselled her still to use. “Be near me, for it gives courage to know of one trusty heart among so many false ones. Yet show yourself as little as may be. Your unwise raid upon the Fleet has surely placed you under Sir John Fielding’s espionage. Be careful, but do not in her trouble desert your Grizel !” She smiled with condescension on the family porter, affably at poor Miss Bate.

The chair was closed ; its curtains drawn. It departed under escort *en route* for Westminster Hall, Jasper walking by the window. He would have been wiser of course, had he stopped at home, especially as Deborah had become quite intractable. The Duchess, however, settled that matter with characteristic nonchalance. With a bewitching smile at the officer commanding the company of guards (who incontinently decided the siren to be a victim of vile plots), she requested that her poor mad maid upstairs might be carefully looked after. She left her household gods in charge of this son of Mars, who swore, as he bent over her hand, that his company of regulars could keep the whole mob of London at bay, if need were ; that upon her return at night he would hand the keys of the citadel to the chatelaine intact as he received them.

Another intoxicating smile and she was gone, while the officer prayed in his heart that the trial might last many days, and the rioting for ever, in order that his bliss might be long-lived.

Stone, whose vigilance was like a peacock's tail, watched the cavalcade depart from an ambush in the cross-road ale-house, and was beside himself with glee. That wayside boozing-ken (the same where the highwaymen waited on the day of the old Duke's death) was an admirable point of vantage. The good wife who abode there considered the gentleman demented who elected to occupy her own

garret rather than the fine chamber below with its white sheets and bunches of rosemary. He said he was prepared to pay for a view of Tewkesbury Gardens ; so she took his money nothing loath, for indeed it was comforting in such dangerous times for a lone woman to have a gentleman as a lodger who was so well armed as this one.

Within half an hour of the departure of its mistress two placards were stuck, by invisible agency, upon the venerable outer wall of Tewkesbury courtyard, and hosts of idle faces were on the broad grin, as a man in a red waistcoat read them aloud. It was remarkable how many idlers there were about, for this road was not a much-frequented thoroughfare, merely a wide by-road leading from Bloomsbury to the pleasure-grounds of Mary le Bone. Very remarkable indeed ! For the idlers all wore cockades ; many appeared to know each other well ; all knew the man in the red waistcoat ; all glanced with saucy menace from time to time at that grim, bleak, windowless outer wall, yet they clearly were not weavers. They belonged to the Wilkes faction, for their cockades were blue. What could their business be before Tewkesbury House ?

The man in the red waistcoat read the placards aloud with emphasis. One was calculated to inflame weavers, for in addressing the noblewomen of England it said, “ Why clothe your white bodies in a Nessus-shirt wrought by our country’s enemies ? Without

a demand for foreign rubbish there would be no supply; just as, if there were no receivers, there never would be thieves.” The other paper harped on the new popular grievance of Mr. Grenville’s *lettre de cachet*—that unhappy general warrant. The merest mention of it, as Pitt foresaw, was sufficient to irritate the people. The man in the red waistcoat (who was no other than Sim Ames) knew by this time how to play upon their feelings, so, raising his two arms aloft, he said: “Fellow-citizens, ye know that ministers are turned highwaymen—nay, worse! For the gentry of the road never invade houses—yet these have, in cold blood, robbed our patriot—stolen his goods from his house—his letters from his drawers—cast him to languish in a dungeon—and this is a country where, thanks to Magna Charta, the name of vassal is said to be unknown! Ye have retorted on the Star-chamber tyrants, and in so doing have done well. But alas! they are so horse-hided that ye must do more. The soldiery are out—why? Is it an experiment to see how much enslaved Englishmen will bear—to know if they will endure, unmoved, the drawing up of their own army against themselves, the pointing of muskets which they pay for against their own bosoms? You dare to love the saviour of your country, to think of restoring your warped liberties. That is enough. They will grind you to powder if ye take not heed!” The astute Stone was wise in his generation. He had primed his lieutenant

well, and was pleased as he looked down from the ale-house garret among the trees at the gathering surge. Sim Ames was a willing pupil too. It was in the worst taste for Scratchpole to have treated his ally as he had done. They started together on equal terms all those years ago. It was Sim who suggested the formation of a gang; it was he who placed it ready-formed under Scratchpole's guidance, and that chieftain had the disgusting ingratitude to treat him as a serf. Sim, being good-natured in the main, had stood much, but that final twitting on the Dover road was more than he could bear. Deserted by the gang, he warmly entered into all Stone's plans in so far as they tended to retaliation on Jasper. Now Tewkesbury House was a fine nut to crack. The ruffians of Houndsditch (experienced cracksmen) shrank at first from the attempt. The encircling wall was high. Its capabilities for defence enormous. But with license grew courage. Small houses, then entire streets, had fallen before their bow and spear. Ancaster House was even now beset by the weavers. Why, after all, should not Tewkesbury House be stormed? Ames took his precautions; gave the coal-whippers a rendezvous at a given hour; assembled all the stray rabble that he could; and amused the idlers till the decisive moment by a reading of placards and inflammatory rhetoric.

He faced the growing throng, and gallantly doffed his hat in acknowledgment of the applause which

greeted him. When his back was turned, the ancient porter, whose faithful blood was boiling at the outrage heaped upon his mistress, stole forth on tiptoe, tore down the placards, and hastily retiring slammed the wicket to and bolted it. The rabble could scarce believe its thousand senses. Insolence of ministers indeed ! The lackeys were following their example ; daring to beard his Majesty King Mob. A rush was made at the gate, but its stout oaken panels moved not. No sign came from within. Contempt was being massed on insolence. “ Give us the paper—the paper—the paper !” screamed the crowd. No answer. The daily coach from Chelsea to Mary le Bone rumbled up a cross-road—the only coach which had not ceased its service. At sight of the great domed vehicle studded with broad-headed nails, with oval windows in the quarters and red-painted frame and wheels, Sim was delivered of an idea. “ The coach ! Bring it here !” he shouted. Quickly a hundred hands dragged the struggling postilion from the leader, tore his green and gold coat from off his back, and drew the rumbling carriage against the wall. Here was a stepping-stone, better than half a dozen ladders ; for its big basket and iron luggage-bars formed handles whereby fifteen men could swarm over at a time. The three horses kicked and plunged ; those who were crawling up fell into the ditch ; the unwieldy machine wheezed over, subsiding against the wall.

“Courage! Lift it up!” directed Ames. “Lift it up and hie over!”

“*Open the gates wide!*” cried a voice of command from within.

The brave old porter obeyed. The bolts shot from their sockets. The huge gates revolved creaking on their hinges. The mob pressed forward but — recoiled with a low growl; for a double row of soldiers occupied the courtyard with muskets levelled and matches burning. The house too stood wide open. Through the hall a suggestive view could be obtained of wintry pleasure-grounds, statues, fountains silent in the frost, clumps of sombre evergreens, and cavalry encamped among the trees. King Mob might (urged by his usual impulse) have deemed prudence the better part of valour but for Sim Ames. “See!” he shouted, “yet another affront. A Scotch regiment is sent to crush us Londoners. Down with Lord Bute! A cheer, mates! Wilkes and Liberty!” Those who were farthest from the gate were imbued with valour by Sim’s words, the more so when he added with confidence, “They won’t dare to fire on us! In St. James’s Street t’other day soldiers levelled pieces, but none fired.”

This was true enough. Indeed the law upon the subject was at this time very odd. By law, soldiers were forbidden to fire unless first attacked with firearms. If they transgressed the law, then were they deemed guilty of murder. When, therefore, two or

three hundred men were ordered to go against three thousand rioters they stood in this position. If they refused to go it was mutiny, and they could be condemned by court-martial and shot. If they went and did *not* fire, they stood the best possible chance of being knocked on the head themselves ; whilst, if they were so misguided as to fire and kill somebody, they would certainly be tried by a jury and hanged. Sim Ames knew how to make the most of this absurd predicament,

The crowd wavered, not knowing how to act. Those who were behind pushed forward those who were in front. A shower of stones and dirt was flung at the troops. A brick-bat striking the aged porter on the temple, felled him to the ground, where he lay prone, his white hair dabbled with crimson. The captain in command, raised on a mounting-block, tried to argue with the rioters. He implored them not to put his humanity to so severe a trial as to force him to extremities. They only roared, shook fists, and pressed upon the soldiers.

Sim cried : “ See his jackboots. A boot ! a boot ! ” and, tripping him up, tossed both his boots to amuse those who seethed outside. The boots were caught and passed from hand to hand, while the enraged captain, appearing on the block again in stockinged feet, shrieked out :

“ Bring me that ringleader in the red waist-coat dead or alive ! ”

The mob rushed forward to save their champion from the soldiers, trampling the prone old porter into shapelessness.

“ You dare not fire, Scots !” bawled out a virago, “ or was it at Culloden that you learned to slay your countrymen ?”

A new torrent of stones, dirt, filth, impressed her words.

“ On your own heads be it ! *Fire* — men !” shouted the officer.

The men raised their pieces and fired a volley. When the smoke cleared a prolonged yell went up to heaven, for old men, women, children, who, being weak, had been pushed forward as a screen by those behind, lay writhing on the pavement in the agonies of death. The infuriated mob flew on the soldiers before they could load again, and wrestled with them hand to hand. The men clubbed their Brown-Besses and formed hastily in square, dashing down brass-bound musket-stocks on upturned faces. The captain ordered two men to pursue the man in the red waistcoat, who, finding himself followed, took refuge in the porter’s lodge.

“ I have done nought, I do protest,” he cried trembling. “ I was but looking on. Nay ! strike me not !” Shrieking, he ran round and round a table, which being upset, he strove to conceal himself in the curtains of a bed. “ Mercy—for the dear Lord’s sake ! I am so young !”

One of the soldiers brained him as he crouched, and, dragging his body thence, fought with it as a buckler up to the steps. Sim Ames, absent a moment, appeared now upon the wall directing the movements of the rabble with voice and gesture.

“See, see!” he shouted. “Spawn of the devil! murderers! tigers! They care not whom they kill so long as they have blood to drink! They chose to take that lad for me because his vest was red.”

He was pointing from his place upon the wall at the body, which was being buffeted about amid the crowd, and his sally was answered by a piercing scream. A woman battled with nails and teeth, whose anguish would not be repulsed.

“My son, my son!” she screamed; “who but now left me!” Beside herself with horror, she shook her clenched fingers in a soldier’s face. “Oh, villain, villain! A mother’s curse light on ye all for this!”

Raising his besmeared musket-stock, that soldier struck the woman down. Now rose the fierce passions of the mob to delirium-heat. A body of coal-whippers, who, begrimed with the dirt of many days’ tumult, looked like miners, came up at a trot. Drunk with unchecked rapine, they thrust less-experienced brawlers on one side, and, like a sable flood, swept back the redcoats to the threshold of the grand hall. Then burst forth such an uproar of curses and shrieks, of sobbing, quickened breath, and pattering

thuds and blows on steel-split skull and cudgel-battered pate, as sure those veteran walls had never heard before. The officer in command, poor painted boy, was strangled by a grip of iron fingers on his throat, then slung limp to a lamp-post in his stockinged feet. Such of his men as had not already met their death were trampled and crushed as the advancing human wave swept over the courtyard. But, once within the hall, it received a check. So great had been the din all round him, that Sim wist not for a moment of the approach of reinforcements. They arrived in good time, for the rebel forces, weakened by fighting, might possibly have fallen an easy prey to the cavalry established in the gardens. The two opposing forces met, and the former, beaten back by a foe who was as yet untired, received grievous usage at the hands of friends behind. But now yet another detachment of allies came upon the scene, without whose timely aid Sim's army would have been routed after all. The weavers had on their side not been idle during the watches of the night. In the morning they took Ancaster House by storm, and, having fairly set it ablaze, were wending to St. George's Fields quietly, when Stone, who from his observatory beheld them moving out of reach, flew from his garret and appeared upon their route.

“Where go ye?” he asked.

“Some to Westminster Hall to waylay and petition the King, some to camp for rest,” was the reply.

Then he told them that Scotch adventurers were massacring the citizens of London in Tewkesbury Gardens, and implored them to go to their relief.

Promptly the weavers divided themselves into two bands, one for Westminster, one for immediate service. Making a circuit, the wearers of the red cockade came upon Tewkesbury Gardens in rear, and so silent was their approach over the fields, that the cavalry, who, fearing no danger from behind, were moving to the succour of the foot-guards in the courtyard, were taken by surprise. One detachment, decked with red ribands, advanced at double-quick to the attack, whilst another stove a breach in the garden-wall, through which poured all of the scum that had avoided the hot work about the gate. The cavalry, surprised, turned and charged amongst the invading mob, hacking to right and left, but these weavers were desperate men. They hamstrung the horses, though many had their brains dashed out in clumsily attempting it. They stabbed at the riders with knives when they made an effort to dismount. Yet such is the power of discipline, that it is doubtful whether success would ultimately have crowned their onset, but for the constant pouring in of fresh recruits through the breach, who, by sheer weight of numbers, drove men and horses up the stone incline from the garden into the great hall. There the bewildered cavalry found themselves between two fires, for at this moment the coal-whippers finally swept down

the redcoats and surged into the mansion. Then was the scene renewed with twofold intensity which had horrified on-lookers in the courtyard. Through every entrance pressed the frantic mob, crushing in the breast-bones of their friends against the walls in their eagerness to obtain admittance. The horses, maddened by knife-slashing, plunged upon the marble stairs, slid on the polished floor, caught their hoofs in the rich carpet, sent the priceless vases toppling on the heads of those below. Frenzied rioters, climbing into gilded niches, in their madness hurled the statues down, which crashed and splintered into fragments, splashed red with the blood of those they slew.

Brawny fellows, drunk with excitement, seized horses by their bits and pushed them, foaming, step by step, up the grand staircase, in hope that in their terror they would take the balustrade. When men are blood-drunk they heed not whom or how many they may kill. Three hussars found themselves thus in extreme peril on the first landing. Vainly with sabres they tried to cut the hands which clutched the bridles; but their antagonists held on unheedful of wide gashes on their wrists, laughing wildly as they urged the horses on with stabs. Maddened, the poor beasts leapt into the whirlpool beneath, which parted with a scream of agony. The horses fell—plunging with broken limbs on their stunned riders—the three horses and three men in a mangled

heap against the figure of Zenobia. The white, ghostly queen in chains looked—sorrow-stricken and dumb—on the scene of carnage, and tottering slowly fell forward with a crash. The ghost of the duchess with chained hands and a towering crown vanished in the human maelstrom which opened and closed over it like water. A cornet of cavalry (the only officer left now) rallied the few remaining soldiers for a last effort at escape. Hemmed in as they were, to remain another instant would be certain death.

“Forward, men! charge!” he shouted. There was a sway, a flash of swords, a rearing up of animals, and all that was left of the troop, leaping through the garden windows, galloped off to procure assistance.

The shout of victory from those within was echoed and re-echoed by ten thousand throats without. Sim, followed closely by the captains of the weavers, sprang over the shattered statues up the stairs. This was the moment he had panted for. This was the time to punish domineering Scratchpole through his sister. After the captains followed a jostling crew of haggard fellows, who spread from room to room, bent on destruction. There was no use in trying to steal. One with a rare casket in his hand would be robbed of it, and probably killed as well, ere he was twenty yards from the threshold. Besides, the mob were weary of booty, and all were now delirious

with blood-letting. “Smash!” was the *mot d’ordre* to-day. And *smash* did one and all with a good will. Boaz and Ruth in precious tapestry failed to protect her Grace’s suite. In a trice they were torn in shreds. The yellow damask was wrenched from the walls; Mr. Grinling Gibbons’ flutes and Cupids pulled from their panels. Slim patrician Tewkesburys, handed down to respectful posterity by Lely and Vandyk, hung slashed in strips. China, glass from Venice, jewelled nicknacks, costly furniture, lay in a common wreck piled on the tessellated floors. The weavers, with a vengeful eye for foreign fabrics, rent the Duchess’s state-bed to tatters—a bed whose gold and silver imagery had cost the eyesight of a whole conventful of nuns, ere Harry the Eighth turned them forth upon the world. There was not one in all that furious crowd who could pity the ruin of an artist’s supreme culture and intelligence. A La Robbia Virgin smiled her perpetually insipid smile, though her face was cracked across by a battered Cellini candlestick. Still the mob poured in, breaking to yet smaller fragments the already ruined Penates; tearing to minutest rags the silken and velvet hangings.

When he had despatched the weavers to Sim’s help, Stone returned to his eyrie, and through his telescope scanned, with varying emotions, the conflict betwixt law and riot. He saw his lieutenant advance, retreat, advance again, urge on the faint of

heart, encourage the rebuffed. Sure a more fitting man for his purpose he could not have chosen; a man who, besides hope of pay, had now a secret grudge to spur him. When men and horses were forced into the hall, he closed his telescope and clapped his hands. The King's soldiers were caught in a trap; there was no doubt of victory now. So far his plans were succeeding beyond expectation. As hurriedly he mingled with the mob, he laughed and muttered to himself:

“ Is not this rare? Whether she wins the case now pending at Westminster or not, I am at least half revenged; for her household gods are broken. But I must bestir myself. She has carefully kept the woman prisoner—*for me!* She takes the key with her, but in her absence I prise open the strong-box.”

He found the grand staircase impassable. A sodden coal-heaver straddled on the landing, quarrelling with a comrade as to individual strength. The one lifted a piece of a Cupid's torso (for which gem of art the Duke on his polite tour had paid four thousand pounds, whilst less fortunate virtuosi wrung disconsolate hands), and his rival swung on his broad shoulders like a sack of coals the remaining fragment of the antique treasure. Each vowed that his piece was the heaviest. Those a few steps below cried out for a passage to be cleared, threatening to enforce their arguments with pistols filched

from dead soldiers' belts. A brawl ensued, a tussle; then both portions of the statue were hurled pellmell over the balustrade, regardless of the havoc made by shattered Love.

Stone dived to avoid the rain of marble splinters, and hurried up a dark back-stair. In the front drawing-room, where he had often lounged during her Grace's *levées*, he found Sim Ames, smoke-begrimed, perspiring; and whispered in his ear:

“Come! at the back, above. Jasper's old rooms. You know them.”

His lieutenant nodded, and led the way along intricate passages panelled in black oak; stopping at length before a door from behind which issued cries for help. With a kick of his foot Sim smashed the lock. Stone entered the room, where Deborah lay on the floor in strong hysterics. The firing, the fighting, the noise of breaking furniture had alarmed her beyond measure, for she was already over-excited, over-nervous, by reason of recent events. That struggle with Hannah had unstrung her nerves. Since that awful time her lines seemed to be falling each day into worse places. Strange distant sounds had disturbed her sleep by night, the lurid glare of burning houses was continually startling her. During the last two days she had seen nobody but the Duchess, who, when she brought her food, was full of gibes and taunts.

At the first dreadful volley fired an hour or so

ago, all the servants scampered to the attics, screaming “Fire!” “Thieves!” Miss Bate, with shrill lamentations, had got into a cupboard. Deborah had tried with bleeding fingers to force her prison-door in vain, and was resigning herself to a cruel death, when unexpected help arrived in the familiar person of good Mr. Stone.

“He was come on purpose to fetch her,” he said hurriedly. “The wicked Duchess, who, as she of course perceived, was anxiously desirous of her death, was at this present moment on her trial. If she would do as she was bidden, she might yet undo this fiendish noblewoman, who twice had shamefully ill-treated her, and be brilliantly rewarded into the bargain.”

Deborah, utterly incapable of reflection, fell out of fainting-fit into fainting-fit, till Sim, as a gentle hint, ripped a mattress, and, frying some feathers on the coals, stuffed them up her nostrils.

“You are right. The Duchess,” she murmured, trembling from head to foot, “wanted to grill me here. I know her now, the wicked woman, and will do anything.”

Wrapping a cloak about her, Stone supported the parson’s feeble widow down the private stair, and reached the gardens just as an inquisitive multitude discovered the back way. The mob kept pouring in like a tribe of insects on the march up the grand staircase, the stairs of service, to the very garrets,

where the household crouched, huddled in a heap, imploring mercy. Many of the women, among them unhappy Miss Bate, had leapt from upper windows in the terror of the battle on the stairs, and had dragged their maimed bodies into shelter among the trees. But King Mob meant to be clement to the servants ; for the wretched creatures were bound by some means or other to earn their bread. He was content to turn their liveries inside out and fling them forth tied back to back in twos, to save their bones from fracture if they might.

Not a chamber escaped ; not a cupboard. Women concealed what linen they could under their cotes and waddled off to hide it. Not a picture, or a glass, or a rare article of vertù but fell a victim to popular vengeance, which was fairly loosed at last. These nobles who had been set over the lower lieges as friends and guides had danced and feasted while they starved, had tortured their sons and ravished their daughters. There had been one law for the rich, another for the poor. But the hour of retribution had arrived.

At length the hands of the iconoclasts were weary. Sim, who, looking round upon the ruin, felt with compunction that perhaps Jasper was over-punished for his contumely, prepared to lead his band elsewhere. The weavers, left then to themselves, saw only a palace furnished with the wealth of foreign looms. Dancing on the torn curtains and rich

carpets, they cried out for fire to complete their work. Her Grace's bedroom was set alight in several places, and, an alarm being raised that troops were approaching in force, the holocaust was left to consume alone. The rioters, to evade pursuit, spread themselves over the adjacent fields, and, as fighting is thirsty work, straggled in groups in quest of drink.

A regiment of hussars, despatched in haste by my Lord Granby, found Tewkesbury House deserted—in flames. It was nearly sundown before the conflagration could be mastered.



CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST OF HANNAH'S PRISONERS.



URING those terrible weeks, whilst London lay gasping under the thrall of an exasperated mob, Sot's Hole showed little sign of life. The malefactors swung and the wind howled and the gibbet creaked as of yore. The vaporous winding-sheet still wrapped the earth, communicating to the universal mother fevers and rheumatics, pains for the racking of her children. The lurid light hung over the city, growing sometimes into a flare, as a goodly pile of buildings blazed and smouldered, then subsided again into a hot glow, which Hannah never wearied of watching.

Hannah passed her time entirely alone; for the gang had no need of concealment now. They plied their trade openly under the very windows of St. James's, and no one said them nay. When palaces were being wrecked, what mattered the petty pilfer-

ing of a snuff-box in the street? The old crone remained undisturbed, to mumble and gibber to herself through the long days. Now and again she ventured forth into the city to watch the havoc there, for it was a brave spectacle to see men turned to demons—to mark how hell had broken loose in the greatest city of the world. Then she returned with a few scanty provisions, trimmed her fire, and crouched beside it staring at the embers, while half-forgotten memories moved in shadowy procession through her distempered brain. Two ideas above all others kept recurring as the kaleidoscope of her mind was shaken. She regretted the loss of her prisoner—of that parson's widow whom she had well-nigh terrified out of her senses. It was base of Jasper to have wrested this prisoner from her—Jasper who, as one of Bambridge's chief victims, should the rather have lent a helping hand. The second idea was connected with this one. The menagerie locked in behind the shutters and window-frames was in a disturbed state. Was this caused by a condition of the atmosphere, or was it a serious portent? The dogs and cats whined incessantly. The old woman gave them food, but still they moaned in concert. Something was in the wind. The vengeance of an oppressed people was being poured forth on London. Was hers to be of more tardy foot? Surely not. The tether of her persecutors was almost run out. The days of Corbett, Bambridge, and the rest were

counted. Of their sand there lingered now but a few specks. The angel of the fiery sword stood ready, who should drive them to burn eternally beside the wicked lord who together with them had ruined her life.

But what of the others ? This disturbed her. Was that vain, flaunting Lady Grizel to go unpunished, who dared to occupy the place of her own son who was no more ? And this parson's wife, too, who, as the remaining half of a bad man that had no business to die in his bed, also deserved chastisement—why was she permitted to escape ? Then the old dread would come over the solitary crone. That she was mad she knew. Was the story of the wicked lord, of her private marriage in the bedchamber, of her boy, merely the coinage of a diseased intellect ? What a frightful doom is madness when you know that you are under the ban ! Was she born mad ? No. That could not be. Bambridge had left his indelible marks on her—his work was signed ; the scars upon her limbs, the distorted thumbs, a scorching hatred of all upon the earth, which withered up her soul.

As vistas of days long dead opened for an instant —vistas, some of sunlight, of church bells, of a fair village maid coquetting among her swains ; others black as Erebus, of the strong-room, the shears, the lash—she shuddered and groaned, and flinging an apron over her head (as was her way when

troubled), sat rocking and rocking, till from mere exhaustion she fell asleep. Then a few hours later—whether day or night mattered little—she woke chilled and numbed, hobbled out to commune with the highwaymen upon the tree, to peer into the mist which lay on the greasy river—then returned again to rock and rock as before. So passed her days at Sot's Hole, till little by little the few remaining strands of reason flitted from her. Her mind became well-nigh a blank.

The bundle of papers left by Deborah were a source of amusement. Squatting on the three-legged stool, she rehearsed half-forgotten games with them. Faro, which she learned to please my lord ; Piquet ; E.O. They changed like images in a magic-lantern, from Kings to Queens and Knaves, then to figures of her lost boy, of her betrayer, of Corbett or of Bambbridge. Then in terror she flung them from her, to rock and rock as usual—or, in the fear produced by the goblin documents, tore them to tiny fragments and scattered them upon the hearth. Thus out of the bundle only three certificates remained, dirty, faded, so pale as to be nearly illegible. With these last three she played her elfish game while Tewkesbury House was burning, little suspecting that her prayers for vengeance on the usurper of her rights were being answered at that moment.

It was midday. Sleet and fine snow began to whirl in eddies. The bleak details of the landscape

were quite shut out, save only the black looming gibbet. A short figure closely shrouded in a roque-laure, with a hat cocked over its eyes, passed rapidly before the window, raised the latch as though familiar with it, entered and stood looking at the crone.

She glanced at the man with no recognition in her face, then dreamily fumbled with the papers again. Advancing into the room the man threw off his cloak and hat. He was stumpy, thick-set, with a bull-neck and retreating forehead. His eyes had a steely glitter in them. His mouth, which was large and coarse, twitched uneasily. His cheeks were of a dull yellow, only a shade lighter than his hair.

“Hannah ! hist !” he said.

At the sound of his voice she crumpled the papers in her hand, and cowered back with a low growl like a cowed beast against the wall. He gazed at her with a half-smile ; she returned his look with one of abject dread. Though her lips formed words her throat gave forth but a guttural rattle.

“Hannah ! hist !” the man repeated. “It is I—Bambridge.”

“*You—here !*” she whispered fearfully. “You ! I will not go back. I will not. I will not. Kill me first.”

“Hush, you old fool !” he replied, looking to see that they were alone.

“Old, old ! Yes, old, you villain ! thanks to you —before my time.”

She was gathered up in a corner on hands and

knees, scratching the boards in nervous excitement with her nails.

"Silence, brute!" Bambridge said sharply. In an instant she was still. "Now pull your wits together and understand me. If you do not—see, here is a whip that has roused many besides you. Listen. London is too hot for me. This morning we were attacked again. Such regiments as were attainable are on duty about Westminster Hall. At this rate the metropolis will need a standing army to itself. We were attacked suddenly. Corbett's sponging-house is a blackened ruin. He took refuge with the lepers in an upper chamber, but harassed by flames jumped out at last upon a row of pikes. He was pierced through and through and died. Served the fool right for not making good his escape. They are even now, the dastardly scoundrels, raving round the Fleet. It may surrender at any moment. But ha, ha! the fox is flown; they may do to his earth whatsoever they please. I have come here for safety. You must hide me."

A moan from the back-premises caused the man to start. "What is that?" he said.

Hannah with glistening eyes was squatting on her hams, rolling the papers mechanically between her fingers. "Corbett gone—at last," she muttered, "and you escaped. How strange!"

"What are you mumbling about, hag?" Bambridge inquired brutally.

"Is it to be my deed?" she went on to herself.

“ The trap which leads to the river ! You come to me for safety,” she said with a wild laugh. “ This place is mined. By opening a trap I could send you through a hole into the river. I am not going to do so, or I would not have warned you. Yet why should I not ? Why not ? Because his end would be too peaceful.” She was speaking half to her visitor, half in self-justification.

“ If you dare to hint of treachery,” retorted Bambridge, turning yellower, “ I’ll lash the life out of you with this knotted thong !”

But this time Hannah did not shrink. The moaning from behind went on increasing, but in a feebler key than usual. Hannah, ardently believing in her omens, was certain that this boded ill for Bambridge. She laughed and showed her teeth at him, clutching the air with claw-like fingers.

“ The hag’s madder than I thought !” he muttered.

Drawing the settle close to the hearth, he raked together the embers and heeded her no more. His thoughts were not of a jocund kind. This desperate attempt of the rabble on the Fleet was unfortunate, even if they failed to burst its wickets. The rioters had by this time gone to such lengths as to render it of the first importance to reduce them to order without delay. The respectable classes were full of indignation. Ministers must act promptly, people said, and firmly, or public opinion would ensure their dismissal in disgrace. Regiments would be

called in from outlying districts. The scum would be swept up and consigned to Mr. Ketch. So far, so good. But unluckily more remained behind. The lower orders, after their violent fashion, had made it patent to Europe that the internal government of England needed reform. For very shame's sake long gathering and festering abuses would have to be looked into and set straight. Mr. Bambridge was quite aware that he in his own person was one of the most crying evils in the town, inventor and perfecter of a system whereby the unfortunate were mulcted of their last farthing, then harried by ingenious torments into eternal silence. He was aware that his system had flourished rankly as blooms the noxious weed, simply because by judicious bribery he had kept the eyes of justice bandaged. But now this spiteful rabblement had by the very fierceness of its several attacks drawn the eye of the world to Mr. Bambridge. Like the loathsome reptile which abides in subterranean caves, the light of day meant Ruin to the warden of the Fleet. He fled thence by a back-way upon the second attack, so soon as he found that no military assistance was forthcoming, and rode to Sot's Hole as a safe hiding-place till he should have carefully reflected on his position. Ruined he was, no doubt ! With grindings of the teeth he remembered that in his haste he had neglected a certain box under his bed. In it was the life-blood of his victims, wrung

from them drop by drop through years of suffering. Bills, notes, an important sum. Also documents which would destroy him. Bitterly he cursed his insane folly. Another minute or two would have made no difference. It was a panic which had seized him. And now—unless he could gain access to that box again—he must fly penniless from England with all speed, to begin life anew on a foreign shore in the autumn of his years.

The subdued sounds of lamentation close by began to prey upon his nerves. Starting from lugubrious reverie he said to Hannah: “What is that?”

Moping and mowing at him she answered with a titter: “You, Bambridge, in your death-throes!”

Unfurling the long lash of his whip he struck at her. The knotted thong curled round her frail body like a snake, but she felt it not.

“Yes, you!” she repeated in exultation. “You! For so surely as that dog is dying are you near your end!”

Disgusted with her, himself, the ruin which overshadowed him, Bambridge kicked the embers with his foot, sending miniature fireworks speeding about the room.

“That’s fine!” cried the mad woman. “More fireworks—more! The embers blacken. Here’s that will feed them!” Gaily she tossed the remainder of Ames’s treasures on the fire.

A half-obliterated name caught the desultory gaze

of Bambridge. It smoked and browned previous to bursting into flame. He snatched it up before it flared. His face turned scarlet, then yellow again. His fading eye resumed its steely glitter.

“Hannah, how came you by this?”

“Burn it! Burn it! More fireworks, more!” she cried, striving to snatch the paper from him.

“Peace, hag! Know you what it is?”

“A knave, a queen, a trump, a spade!” she sang, blithely nodding; then, a shade of horror passing over her face, she concluded in low tones: “No, no! a portrait of *him*, my little boy, murdered by Bambridge—the fiend! the devil!”

The apron was tossed over the dishevelled head. Her visitor was forgotten. Unmindful of all but the dread vision, Hannah rocked slowly to and fro.

Bambridge sat awhile immersed in thought. The devil rarely neglects his own unless they play at repentance. Here was a stroke of luck. The town was agog about her Grace of Tewkesbury, who at this moment was standing in the dock before her peers. King and Court were there to investigate a scandal, which interested the warden of the Fleet so far, that for years he had known and served various branches of her family. Even as he rode along this very morning and stopped to water his horse, a tavern-keeper had insisted upon discoursing of the Duchess.

“The mob have taken the matter up,” he said.

“ ‘Tis notorious she’s guilty, but there are no proofs; so, lest she should escape, they are burning down her house.”

No proofs! why! here—legible if scorched—was the certificate of her marriage with John Bellasis, bachelor. That document would settle the question—the heir-at-law would be for ever grateful—would help the man who decided the case out of any little temporary trouble! Nay! the King, who, above all things, desired of course to see justice administered, would smile on the bearer of the paper and condone any trifling peccadilloes. What a convenient, trusty, faithful friend is that much-abused, gentleman in black!

Bambridge placed the precious paper in his bosom, and sternly seizing Hannah by the wrists squeezed them to enforce attention.

“Your future depends upon yourself,” he said very slowly, in order that his words might penetrate her brain-webs, while his steely eye fixed hers as a boa a rabbit’s. “*Lord Gowering deceived you.* You were married, and you had a son. That son lives. I will restore him to you on one condition. You must come with me—now—to Westminster. Do you follow what I say?”

Hannah looked vacantly at him, then shuddered.

“Lives!” she murmured. “Lives! I will never see him. Never, never, never! For he is an outcast, and will curse me—his mother—for it!”

Bambridge was taken aback. This was unfortunate. That she was duly married he knew long since—when, indeed, his evil passions urged him to try and make a mistress of an earl's discarded wife. The earl, as he well knew, stole her lines as she slept and burnt them, then locked her in the Fleet. He could give back her son as the guerdon of obedience, for that son had been the special object of his vindictiveness ever since his birth. But render him legitimate again he could not. What singular freaks do mad people take. She would not have her son lest he should upbraid her for his bastardy. Did ever lunacy go greater lengths ?

It will strike you, doubtless, cunning rogue of a grandson of mine, that, holding the document concerning my Lady Grizel, he might have snapped his fingers at Hannah, and have gone off with it alone. But the danger of his position made him cautious. The evil-minded might be prone to suspect him of stealing it, and so he might come to forfeit all claim to consideration. By producing Hannah he could declare with truth that she would have destroyed it but for him ; that he saved it ; that all thanks were due to the upright person whose presence of mind and honesty should stop a tedious suit. At one moment he thought of selling it to the Duchess on her return from Westminster Hall in the evening, but on reflection judged that more would be gained by appealing in person to the King. Here was the

paper, and here was Hannah. But, as ill-luck would have it, the mad-woman was cross-grained. He offered her son as a bait, and she rejected it ! As cajolery was of no avail he would try threats.

“Hannah !” he said, pinching her lean arms, “I hold your son, I say. He is in my power. Do you hear ? Unless you go with me instantly, doing as I shall command, he will lie this night in the strong-room, with weights upon his body and screws upon his thumbs. The skull-cap shall be pressed tight, till nose, eyes, and ears gush forth. In the strong-room, which you know well, he shall languish by your decision. Do you fully understand ?”

Releasing her wrists, she pressed her fingers to her brow. The well-remembered voice stirred every fibre of her being. Yes. She did understand. How horrible ! What were his commands ? How could she be sure that he would keep his word ?

The warden painfully explained to her in the same slow way that the paper she so idly tossed into the embers might save him, Bambridge, from his present difficulty. Was it likely that unless driven thither he should come to Sot’s Hole, where only an’ old crone dwelt, whom he had blasted and flung aside long since ? Was it likely that, being in such sudden trouble, he would risk his life by again appearing in the streets, where so many lurked who were thirsting for his blood, unless by so doing he unexpectedly could right himself ? He explained to

her that her presence was absolutely necessary, that he dared not drag a struggling old woman on his saddle-bow at a moment when great thoroughfares to him were dangerous, that before his Majesty she might claim the fulfilment of his promise, adding privately to himself, that if she babbled of the strong-room he must stop her mouth. Desperate emergencies demand desperate remedies. The risks were many and great, yet must be run.

Hannah trembled so much that she could scarcely stand. Her son ! Her boy ! Then it was true. She was not born mad. Thank Heaven for that ! He would certainly not believe her tale about the stolen lines—would curse her. But Bambridge's threats ! Her poor brain failed to discern that if the warden were himself in such distress his power with the strong-room must be over. The shears—the cap—the thumbscrew ! Reaching her cardinal she tied her hat with shaking fingers, and cried that she was impatient to be gone. Stopping short, she seized the coarse hand of her tyrant and pressed it to her lips.

“If you give my boy to me now,” she said with kindling eyes, “whole, with no hair of his sweet head disturbed, I will even forgive the life-injuries which you have done to me. No day hath passed, Bambridge, without my prayer against thee flying up to God. Give me my child, and I will call them back. Stay ! In proof thereof thy counterpart shall be set free at once.” The old woman, followed

by her visitor, moved round to the mimic prison, the interior of which no eye had ever seen but hers who created it. She unlocked the door, and let in the light. A greyhound, and a cat with little left alive in him but great green eyes, looked out of the darkness. Two white mongrel dogs lay at the entrance —*dead*. Hannah started and looked wistfully at Bambridge. “ You see,” she said ; “ you as well as Corbett. Too late ! your doom is irretrievable ! ”

In anger not unmixed with superstitious dread, Bambridge seized her arm and hurried her along to the spot where his horse was tied. The two emaciated animals drew their feeble limbs along and limped away to die among the sedges, just as fine snow began to fall. The mimic Fleet was empty.



CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

HILE one detachment of the weavers was expending its energies on the House of Tewkesbury, a second was adding its quota to the turmoil about Westminster Hall. Both inside and out that venerable pile was a scene of the utmost confusion. Mr. Grenville and Lord Granby had taken their measures for the King's safety in his own despite, and it was well they did so, for the populace, who had not looked upon him for so long, were determined to tell their lord and master what they thought of him. The sight of Lord Granby's men, too, armed *cap à pie*, did not tend to increase their good-humour. Soldiers crowned with laurel, bearing captive foreign standards, are well enough as a pageant, but the same heroes acting as constables with staves turned against ourselves, are not half so pleasing a spectacle.

“A pretty sovereign,” they said, “is this, who dares not face his people save between two rows of grenadiers.” Respectable citizens turned out in decorous snuff-colour to greet their monarch, but, being speedily hustled by the mob, were glad enough to retreat into taverns, leaving hats and wigs in the hands of the enemy. Three companies of guards kept the entrance free at Westminster, while troops of light horse flitted hither and thither, galloping to right and left, where the crowd appeared to press too closely round a chair or coach—a scowling, threatening crowd, which stretched grimy hands in at carriage-windows demanding money as “benevolence.” Tailors, ferrymen, men of every trade, who, hearing that the King was to appear once more in state, were come with voluminous petitions. All, taking example by the weavers, clamoured for a change of some kind—a general redress of grievances—each group desired that the public might eat, drink, sleep according to its own private interests. Barbarism seemed come again, for this was a reign of terror and of brute force. Respectable people shook their heads ominously. How can this end? they argued. Suppose the butchers were to take it into their heads that (as Religion is always lugged into rebellion) the country were turning Papist, and so that naught but fish was to be eaten in Lent? Billingsgate would fall a victim to their resentment, being garrisoned only by old women, whose weapons—their

tongues—are more calculated to break than to keep the peace. The King's Arms Tavern at Cornhill would be levelled, because of the turtles that sojourn there. Fancy an army rushing forth with marrow-bones and cleavers mounted on mad bulls ! Suppose that the chimney-sweeps, feeling themselves aggrieved, were to force householders to have blazing fires through the dog-days ? It was all very well to joke upon the subject, but the condition of London was becoming more and more alarming. At the commencement of the Wilkite troubles, a large number of the aristocracy were suddenly impelled by an unaccustomed attack of duty to visit their estates. Their education had made of many lordlings carpet-knights. It was the business of the Cabinet and the King—not theirs—to still the rising tempest, so they retired to the country to enjoy the sport of fox-hunting and turn the night to day with song and drink. Certain rumours had been heard, as they were departing, anent a certain duchess; but, not squeamish themselves, they treated the matter as a joke, rumbling off blithely in coach and chaise. What was the general surprise then, when a summons came commanding the attendance of the peers to try one of their order for felony ! The young thought the joke, which began well, was being carried too far. The middle-aged (both male and female) thought with amaze how few there were among them whose lives would bear the daylight.

The old sat wondering whether King and Cabinet were mad. They were fain to admit that the aristocracy as a body was perchance to blame; that “giddy youth,” the ingenuous members of the Mohock and Hellfire Clubs, were apt to treat the lower orders just a shade too much like dogs. It could not be denied that if a poor tradesman begged humbly for money, my lord his debtor would probably prick him with his sword, and dismiss him bleeding and bellowing for his impudence. This was no doubt a pity, for Wesley and Whitefield, preachers, had imprudently taught the scum that all classes were much the same—equally sinful, equally uneducated—different only with regard to their share in the good things of life; and Wilkes, building on the foundation laid, had boldly incited the people to stand up and claim their rights. Under these circumstances, was it not sheer madness to confess frailty by holding up to derision the fairest star of the aristocratic firmament? Certain lords wrote letters to Mr. Grenville and Lord Bute, imploring them to consider the question gravely. Think what you are doing, they said, and how great will be the triumph of Wilkes, your enemy. It will be expensive to try a peeress in the Great Hall, on account of the myriad fees; yet your exchequer is so low that you found yourselves forced to tax the colonies. If the lady wins the day we shall all be made to look ridiculous for dirtying our own nest.

If she is convicted she will claim her peerage and escape scot-free. She makes my lords a curtsey, they make her a bow. What a preposterous affair altogether! A slovenly business, too, a shambling, a mismanaged, and one-eyed sort of trial, wherein the lady, declining even the form of counsel, contemptuously elects to defend her own innocence!

Mr. Grenville was as aware of all this as the lords could be. Lord Bute, with his magnificent opinions relative to the British House of Lords, was extremely shocked. Yet what could either of the twain do? The King, obstinate and resentful, would not interfere; the heir-at-law, Mr. Meadows, egged on by Stone, refused to withdraw the charge. There was nothing for it but to let the case proceed, shambling, slovenly, one-eyed as it might prove to be. The lords, therefore, came up from the country and proceeded in their robes to Westminster Hall, marvelling greatly by the way at the changed aspect of their capital. It looked like a besieged city or one stricken by a plague. Verily it was stricken by a plague, whose symbol was No. 45 in chalk; for what curse more dire can fall on a community than internecine strife—what spectacle is more hideous than that of two brothers hacking at each other's throats?

Oldbourne, the Strand, Ludgate Hill, and Covent Garden were crammed with people of all classes rushing towards Westminster. Tales reached them

of lawless raids in other portions of the town, of excesses and violence due to the drunken coal-whippers. But they were accustomed now to excess and violence. They had grievances engrossed by clerks on reams of paper, and would force the King and his House of Peers to see them righted. The several detachments of petitioners united under the ancient Abbey in such a sea, that my Lord Granby's troops had much ado to keep a passage. The Worshipful the Lord Mayor arrived in state, so did a goodly company of dukes and earls, who were received by the mob with hoots. Painted peeresses, whose curiosity got the better of their fears, appeared in chairs, surrounded each by a small army of retainers. The mob—half in scorn, half to show its strength—broke through the ranks, begging the ladies to intercede with his Majesty, scrawling as a reminder 45 upon each panel. They were permitted to enter unmolested, but the ringleaders swore that none should issue thence till his Majesty had made a promise. The grenadiers struggled hard to keep the entrance clear, the light horse caracoled, the nobles arrived and rustled in, the throng swayed hither and thither. A distant murmur became audible, which rose and increased in volume as a carriage, moving in the centre of a flock of horsemen, rapidly cut its way among the people. Hoots, hisses, yells, jeers. The sad young King sat with bowed head within his gorgous new coach ; the young Queen

by his side was sobbing bitterly. The sight of their Majesties' distress, of their sovereign's veiled eyes and white face awed those who were nearest to the cavalcade. "Peace," they cried. "Peace, let be! The King is among his faithful subjects once again. He will see us righted, never fear!" The King neither looked up nor moved. The reviling of his people—of the subjects to whom he yearned to be a tender father, for whom he had cut out his heart—were singing in his ears; their curses burned into his brain.

Mechanically he walked into the Hall, bowing to left and right, and retired between heavy curtains to a room improvised for the Court circle. Lord Bute and the Princess Dowager were already there, the former having come under cover of the worshipful one, who had received a bad egg on his eye which was intended as an offering to the Scotch Earl. The Princess Dowager, pale and nervous from a long bivouac in a darkened house, decided at first to stop away. If recognised she would certainly receive rough usage, and was no longer young or bold. But the poor woman yearned once more to look upon the master of deportment with the lovely leg, so she came in a plain close carriage with its shutters up. Lady Gladys was there in waiting on her, who was in better spirits than usual, for Lord Bellasis was pronounced out of danger, and it was pleasant to see her rival in a dif-

ficulty. Lady Sarah was in attendance on the Queen, quite bright and fresh again ; for she was at heart a lovely little vixen, and ardently hoped that the woman who had caballed against and stood between herself and happiness, might somehow or other be humbled before her eyes. Lady Caroline Petersham, Miss Ashe, and all the courtly demireps were there ; rouged, painted, raddled, patched, pomatumed, perfumed with bergamot—an offensive crew.

When the King entered every demirep curtseyed low, remarking how very ill he looked, stumbling over chairs and trains as if half-blind. He clung convulsively to his young wife, whose pinched nose, red with crying, made her look more frightful than ever. But there was something more exciting just now than the condition of the Queen's nose. As each lady who had the *entrée* passed between the curtains, she might have been observed to start as if disconcerted. Why ? Because a lady sat there in black who might have been expected to shun rather than court observation. The Duchess of Tewkesbury dared to occupy the Royal Pavilion, just as though she were not to be tried in a few moments on a criminal charge ! Was ever such *aplomb*—such consummate insolence ?

Miss Ashe, whilom her dear friend, cried out as she ogled through a glass, “ Devil confound her ! how brazen the wretch looks ! ” Lady Caroline breathed a word of pity, to which her Grace replied

smiling, “Pity, madam? I’ll keep it for you till your next lover goes to Tyburn, and then return it with a box of comfits.”

It is dreadful to have to say it of her at so critical a juncture (at a time when her palace was being sacked, too), but the Duchess was charmed with her success. The radiance of her self-complacency withered up her enemies. Her case was without precedent. No one knew how to act. She was aware that there were two parties present; the one consisting of old friends who, fascinated by her beauty and wondrous charms, looked on her as a victim of vindictive motives; the other who, wrapped in piety or spite, considered her a wicked adventuress, who as a lesson to young misses should be unmasked. Among the latter was Madam Hannah More, who came to gloat over the schemer’s downfall after the Christian fashion of many pious people; also several lords who, having been repulsed when they made impious love to the beautiful maid of honour, were now gaily hoping that she might at least be burnt in the hand. One amorous gentleman, more humane than the rest, remarked between two pinches of snuff, “Stap me, but she ought to be condemned to have her hand burnt—stap me, she ought! Though it would look ill-natured, perhaps, for one who once adored her to propose it, I should accede to such a proposal, but would recommend the use of a cold iron, *stap me!*” Thus of

those who were to try her, some were convinced beforehand of her innocence, whilst others were equally predetermined that she was guilty, and the culprit laughed at all, for she knew that there were no proofs forthcoming, and rejoiced in advance at her foes' discomfiture.

She arrived at Westminster Hall surrounded by troops, accompanied by her brother and the gang, who then left her to place themselves as near to the dock as possible. Advancing with her most imperial step between serried ranks of counsel, clerks of the court, ushers, spectators, what not, she sought out my Lord Chamberlain, who was conversing with the worshipful one.

“I surrender myself to you, my lord,” she said with an obeisance.

“Oh, very well, just so,” replied his lordship nervously. “A pavilion is prepared for your Grace yonder.”

“No need of it,” returned the Duchess. “As *première Duchesse* of England and ex-maid of honour to her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, I claim the *entrée* to the Royal Pavilion.”

“But, your Grace,” hesitated his lordship, “may turn out not to be a Duchess at all!”

“Clothed in my innocence like a coat of mail, I am proof against a host of foes!” retorted the lady, sweeping away unchecked, while pious Hannah More, who, cross with long waiting and hunger,

overheard her from a gallery, cried out, “Glad your robe of innocence is in such good repair, madam; we need something warm this weather. What a haughty slut!”

So it came about that her Grace occupied the Royal Pavilion by right of conquest and *sangfroid*; and laughed in that none dared to turn her thence. She held her own in spite of King and Court. The small triumph was incense to the outraged pride—the heart-wringing bitterness which took the form of mirth.

Alone among this crowd of bedizened ladies, she sank into sombre reverie. One friend at least was here who promised to remain close by—faithful Jasper, so worn and haggard! He had forebodings about this trial which she could not share. What was it but a clumsy pageant after all, in which she was to play the victor? Near the entrance she had observed Meadows looking excessively uncomfortable. What were his tactics? Where his witnesses? The whole thing was monstrously, prodigiously absurd! A knot of country folks stood near him. At these she glanced keenly in passing. Not one was there who could say anything of moment. People who had known her at the Bath, had seen her at the many frolics over which she was wont to rule. Now not one could possibly speak to the proceedings of a certain fatal night which had warped her nature, twisted her life awry. The only

one who could say aught of that was quietly locked up at Tewkesbury House, under special care of that blushing young captain in the guards. Why, then, Jasper's fears? That very morning when she appeared before him radiant, he observed with a sigh that it might have been better had she stayed abroad, to which she returned the cogent argument that Stone had been right in desiring to keep her away lest her influence in high places should avert this trial of strength. Unhappily she had been forced to undergo the shower-bath of ingratitude. Her own influence turned out to be nil. Yet was she bound to bear the brunt of the attack, for once unduchessed she would also be a beggar. If her foes could only prove the marriage with the Duke invalid, so would his will be—that will which left all he possessed *to his dear wife*.

Sorrowfully she meditated about the old Duke, to whom, thank Heaven, she had been a good wife. How that old man, foolish sinful creature, had adored her! She married him for position selfishly, yet came to experience a softer feeling, begot of his senile devotion for herself. Was it a true devotion, or did he only find her useful? Had anybody ever really loved her for herself in all her tempest-tossed career? Tears were forcing themselves into the eyes of the Duchess at the prospect of her utter loneliness; but she dashed them hastily aside, for raddled Ashe was whispering loudly to Lady Caroline, “ See how she

squeezes out a crocodile's tear to refresh her weeds, as fading blossoms are brightened by a shower."

Shortly after his Majesty's appearance, the Lord High Steward and my Lord Chamberlain hustled the peers into their places. It was as a pageant mighty fine.

First came the clerks of the House of Lords and Chancery, then the Masters in Chancery, two and two, and the judges, and the peers' eldest sons in couples, and their minors. Then Chester and Somerset Heralds, and Garter King-at-Arms, resplendent in stiff embroidery. The archbishops followed next, and the bishops; my Lord Chancellor side by side with my Lord Mayor; then stumbling backwards on his train my Lord High Steward bowing before the King. His Majesty, clutching the Queen's arm, shuffled forward, guided evidently by her, till she steered him safely to the throne. One step below the throne was a seat for the Princess Dowager, who, with Lady Gladys standing behind, sat wistfully watching her son's clouded face. He took no more notice of his mother than if she had been a chair. A gorgeous pageant truly—my lords in their robes and collars, my ladies in rainbow-coloured plumes and jewels. For a moment the sun shone forth upon the spectacle, then the sky darkened, and it began to snow. The tramp of the light horse without was plainly audible, so was the seething of the ever-increasing crowd who blockaded

the doors, determined that real business should be done by the assembly so soon as they were tired of their stage-play.

The High Steward and Chamberlain, both of whom were painfully conscious of the absurdity of their position, did their best to enforce respect by excess of pomp and circumstance. The way they bowed about, and strutted up and down, and consulted with frowns, and cleared their throats, was an amazing sight. Pious Hannah More wept copiously, so edified was she in spite of hunger.

“Though my poor toes are frostbitten,” she sobbed to Madam Garrick by her side, “I would not have missed this pretty mummery for worlds, my dear !”

Silence ! Silence ! on pain of imprisonment ! frowned the Chamberlain.

Silence !! glared Garter King-at-Arms.

Silence !!! fiercely growled Chester and Somerset Heralds.

Nobody was much impressed by the display of heraldic wrath. Ashe tittered. Lady Caroline giggled. Lady Gladys and her sister exchanged a smile.

“Is it your lordships’ pleasure,” demanded High Steward, striving to rival historic Agag, “that the judges have leave to be covered ?”

“Ay, ay !” the lords responded solemnly. High Steward waved a condescending hand to the judges. Indeed it was snowing heavily, and the Great Hall was plaguy full of draughts.

Then, at a look from the Chamberlain, cried the shrill clerk of the court like unto chanticleer, “ Sergeant-at-arms ! make proclamation for the gentleman-usher of the Black Rod to bring his prisoner to the bar !”

“ Oyez ! oyez ! oyez !” screamed pursy Mr. Sergeant-at-arms (to whose lady, when lying-in, her Grace had once been very kind). “ Griselda, Duchess Dowager of Tewkesbury, come forth lest you forfeit your recognizance !”

Then our heroine, sweeping from out the royal pavilion, was brought to the bar by the deputy-gentleman usher of the Black Rod. Withdrawing her widow’s crape, she stood proudly on the platform, and an involuntary hum of admiration went round the assembly. Griselda, Duchess Dowager, was thirty-four years old, which with some women is the zenith of their glory. She was dressed in robes of deepest mourning, a black hood on her head, her hair powdered two feet high, on the summit of which, where hair and hood met, was a tiny ducal coronet in diamonds. Deep ruffles of finest lawn and long black gloves completed the attire of the fairest woman in Westminster Hall, whose blue eyes circled by long lashes—like sapphires in a dark surrounding—shone out against her marble skin, thrown-up to dazzling purity by the sable of her attire. People were accustomed to my Lady Grizel’s *penchant* for white, and the delicate draperies which, combined with a

marvellous complexion, had won for her the sobriquet of “the lily.” For the first time they looked on her in black, and several lords, who wavered as to the punishment of burning, declared that such exquisitely formed hands as were crossed upon her bosom, must undoubtedly be touched by none but a cold iron.

Her Grace performed a stately curtsey, which was answered by a low bow from the rows of peers, who, with his Majesty for a centre, formed a horse-shoe opposite.

“Kneel, madam!” thundered Sergeant-at-arms (whose lady when lying-in, etc.).

“I kneel to One only,” replied her Grace with dignity.

“Consider, I pray you, of it,” urged the Sergeant somewhat sheepishly.

“When I have been convicted of crime,” she answered, “then will I kneel to Heaven for pardon.”

But so stiffnecked a culprit would add to the inherent absurdity of the proceeding.

My Lords High Steward and Chamberlain, Garter, Somerset, Chester, and the rest, implored her Grace to consider of it.

With a scornful lip-curl she knelt, while Hannah More murmured, “What a naughty hussy!”

“Madam, you may rise!” quoth now benignant Chamberlain.

The Duchess rose and passed a kerchief over her knees.

“This is the dirtiest house of worship I was ever in !” she exclaimed audibly.

Lightning flashes of heraldic anger having produced something resembling silence, my Lord High Steward, tripping gracefully, read an exordium from a paper.

“Madam !” he said, “you stand indicted for marrying a second husband, your first husband being living. A crime so destructive of the welfare of society was for many years punishable with death, but the lenity of these blessed days hath substituted a milder punishment in its stead.”

Her Grace stood as erect and as majestic as the statue of Zenobia ; the chains upon her hands were invisible. The people surged without. The day was darkening, for snow filled the air.

“The consideration of these blessed days must tend, madam, to lessen the perturbation of your spirits on this awful occasion ! You might have avoided appearing at this bar. Of your own free will you are here. How say you ? Are you guilty of the felony whereof you stand indicted, or not guilty ?”

“Not guilty !” asserted the Duchess firmly.

“Culprit ! how will you be tried ?”

“By God and my Peers.”

“God send your Grace a good deliverance !”

There was a stir in the vast hall, for the snow

caused the rioters to be unruly. They were tired of the stage-play, which might spread over days.

“Cease this noble fooling!” they cried. “Let the King hear us, then will we go our ways, and the pageant may proceed as he shall list.”

All available military force was gathered round Westminster Hall, for that ancient casket now contained a complete regalia—the King and the flower of his nobility. Three battalions of guards stood motionless before the grand portal; troops of light horse frolicked among the crowd. Lord Granby calculated that outlying regiments should have anxiously entered the city ere this. He gave his orders more boldly now, for so preoccupied was his Majesty that he had never even noticed that contrary to his desire the road to St. James’s was lined with soldiers.

“Oyez! oyez! oyez!” screamed irrepressible Sergeant-at-arms. “All manner of persons that will give evidence on the part of our Sovereign Lord the King against Griselda, styling herself Duchess Dowager of Tewkesbury, the prisoner at the bar; let them come out, and they shall be heard. For now stands she at the bar for her deliverance!”

Her Grace glanced slowly round the lords and gentlemen, with so many of whom she had been intimate since childhood. They were chatting and exchanging snuff-boxes. My Lord Holland was looking stupid, Mr. Grenville uneasy, Lord Bute disgusted. The Great Commoner—where, alas!

was he who used to patronise the wayward maid of honour ?

The counsel of Mr. Meadows whispered and rubbed their periwigs. So did the prosecutor, who seemed more and more ill at ease. A few witnesses stood up and mumbled irrelevant matter, then were frowned into nothingness by Sergeant-at-arms.

At length in desperation arose Mr. Meadows, whom his counsel strove to pacify.

“I humbly implore the mercy of this august assembly !” he murmured in trepidation. “I have been deceived. Witnesses whose presence was promised are not here. I humbly entreat——”

“Nay !” cried the Duchess promptly from her place. “I humbly entreat, my lord, that the case may proceed. This false, malicious boaster must not, I submit, be permitted idly to impeach the honour of your dear dead brother’s widow. Let the case go on, I pray, or fall through for very weakness !”

Her Grace spoke with animation. My lords looked up and yawned. The luckless Meadows wriggled on his seat. The august audience were beginning to laugh at him as one whose malice and greed had trumped up a charge which his wit failed to substantiate. My Ladies Gladys, Sarah, and the rest looked glum, for it seemed as though her Grace were to emerge from the ordeal with flying colours. This was not what they desired. More witnesses were examined from whom nothing could be elicited.

The mob without grew very turbulent. There was a rush—a stampede. Lords rose to their feet in fear. Sure the scum would not dare to penetrate the sanctuary? A door was quickly opened and closed amid a whirl of snow. A man and woman entered, their dresses spotted with white. It was Stone and Deborah.

At this unexpected apparition the Duchess appeared troubled, Jasper moved in his obscure corner, Meadows breathed again. Stone at last! Another half-hour and he would have been too late. The counsel for prosecution, after much whispering, announced smirking to my lords that here was an important—he might venture to say a most important—witness, whose coming had been vexatiously delayed by the mob. Might she be examined? High Steward and Chamberlain bowed to each other, nodded to Garter, Somerset, and Chester, who meditatively flecked snuff from their tabards and bowed all round. The witness might be examined, but High Steward trusted her evidence would prove of greater value than what had gone before, or really, really!— His objections were drowned by Deborah's sobs, who was suffering from pronounced hysteria. She was supported to the platform covered with red cloth which served as a witness-box, was accommodated with a seat, answered certain questions in a low voice, then fairly broke down under the stern gaze of the pale woman in black who stood so still.

“Oh, madam ! mistress !” she sobbed, “why has your inhumanity brought us to this piteous case ? I, who would go on my bare bones for you ! Alack-a-day !”

“Come, come ! Good woman, be calm,” urged smirking counsel. “You say you were present at a marriage celebrated at midnight by your late husband in the year 1747. Proceed to details. Above all, be calm !”

“I too was present,” began Mr. Stone, burning under the scornful looks of her Grace and the contempt of my lords. Lady Sarah had spied him directing the sailors from a window on the day of the procession to St. James’s, and did not keep the discovery to herself. Mr. Grenville fully intended to pounce on Andrew Stone and make of him an example. Was it not too bad a scandal that his Majesty’s tutor, incarcerated once for drinking Jacobite toasts, should now amuse himself with furtive rioting ?

“Silence, sir !” Mr. Grenville said. “This woman seems beside herself.”

“I submit, my lords,” cried the Duchess in clear cold accents, “that the evidence of a delirious woman suborned by a personal enemy of mine, should be deemed invalid. The poor creature, who indeed served me faithfully till her brain softened, is, as all may perceive, demented.”

Her Grace’s partisans, who were numerous, here

cried, “ Ay ! ay !” and Sergeant-at-arms was about to relegate Deborah to the limbo of other abortive witnesses, when that lady, stung by anger into temporary self-control, shrieked out :

“ Demented ! Delirious ! Am I ? I am not the only surviving witness of that marriage ! There stands another. Question her !”

The furious abigail was clutching her chair-back with one trembling hand, while she pointed with the other at Lady Gladys. All the lords stirred in surprise. Madam Hannah More sat goggle-eyed. The plot was thickening. The Duchess knitted her brows and bit her lips ; then was marble again. Lady Gladys trembled violently, and turned from red to white. All eyes were centred on her, save those of his Majesty, which sought the ground. He neither heard nor saw what was passing. The curses of his people were ringing in his ears.

If the Princess had not supported her maid of honour, Lady Gladys would have fallen. As Deborah spoke that scene rose again before her mind sharp in all its details—the scene which for years she had cajoled herself into believing a dream, thanks to the behaviour of Lady Grizel and Lord Bellasis. Simple herself, she could not believe it possible that people could so superbly set aside the past as those two had done. She preferred the rather to disbelieve her senses until that day when Stone spoke to her about a parson with a candle in his hat. Since

then all intercourse had ceased between herself and the Duchess, though the latter knew not the reason of it. Now here was she, suddenly charged before the Peers assembled, with having participated in this long-kept secret, and, taken thus aback, could only murmur with white lips that it was true.

Being requested by High Steward to take her place beside Deborah, Lady Gladys falteringly, with tears, gave evidence—of how, being restless and unable to sleep, she had wandered into the moonlight by gently-gliding Avon, and perceiving a light glimmering in the private chapel, had been impelled by feminine and unfortunate curiosity to peer through a window; of how the handsome bride and groom stood side by side before Parson Ames, with the maid and aunt as witnesses. Having said her say, she burst into a passion of tears. For was she not, driven by remorseless fate, welding with her own hands the chain which must divide her from Lord Bellasis for ever? Lady Sarah was delighted, for there was extra satisfaction in the fact that her sister should be the chosen weapon for the crushing of the common enemy. My lords were dumb with astonishment.

Deborah was still shaking with wrath. “Demented indeed!” she muttered. “Here are my husband’s books, an it please ye—his register books, when, Heaven help his erring soul! he tied silly folks together at the Fleet. I never looked into

them, the shameful things ! maybe they will contain some notice of the ceremony.”

High Steward and Sergeant-at-arms and smirking counsel bowed and nodded and exchanged pinches of rappee, then counsel, clearing his throat, began to turn over the well-thumbed leaves. Gowering and Bellasis—Bellasis and Gowering. Stone knew there was no notice of it, for he had himself searched the books ; but he held his peace. It was evident that my lords had a spite against him.

“There were other papers—in a loose bundle,” continued Deborah, whose nerves were quite strung now by indignation against her mistress’s perfidy. “Alas ! I have lost them.”

“A loose paper. Here is one !” said smirking counsel, “slipped in behind the lining which has burst.” Stone bent forward. He had never seen any loose papers.

“Gowering ! Yes. We have it. No. ’Tis of an earlier date. A marriage solemnised by Parson Ames in his lordship’s bedchamber at Castle Gowering, between Lord Gowering, bachelor, and Jane Hannah Trevass, spinster.”

A long-drawn sob—a catching of the breath—from the corner behind the Duchess. Jasper, every muscle in his haggard face working convulsively, moved into the light with shaking hands. Counsel, surprised at the agitation of the stranger, withheld

the document, but Jasper wrested it from him, murmuring fiercely, "It is mine!"

Again the side-door opened, and a man and woman, torn and muddy, were borne in by soldiers in a swirl of snow. The mob without were furious. The stage-play was lasting over-long. The military and the people were beginning to exchange blows, when some one said, "Mark that man! Lynch him! It is Bambridge of the Fleet!" But at the same instant a knot of seeming idlers (headed by no less a personage than Nimming Ned) beheld old Hannah and a companion in danger of rough usage, and hemming them round succeeded in pushing both within the soldiers' lines before the rabble could seize their clothes. The mob gave a howl, and prepared for violence.

"Save me! Pass me in!" cried Bambridge. "I am a bearer of important evidence!"

The warden and the old woman were hustled breathless through the doorway, followed by a yell while counsel was yet speaking.

"Jane Hannah Trevass is here!" cried the warden, while his companion started and clung to him. It was so long since she had heard her name.

Sergeant-at-Arms, Garter, Somerset, and the rest frowned ominously. This was most improper. Counsel should have seen to his witnesses beforehand. It was indecorous in the highest degree for witnesses to come rushing, after this unceremonious

fashion, into the presence of royalty and peers assembled. But, after all, was not London quite agog and upside-down? Had not his subjects hissed their King? Were they not even now howling outside the doors? Sure the end of the world must be at hand.

Bambridge bowed low with a conciliating grin.

“I meekly crave pardon if over-zealous,” he said, as with his loosened hair he wiped the mud from off his face. “I found by accident a certificate; that is, this good woman here, Hannah Trevass, had it unwitting of its worth, and I made bold to bring her with it.”

Smirking counsel took the scorched paper from him.

“The document we were searching for but now!” he cried. “The certificate of marriage between John Bellasis, bachelor, and Griselda Gowering, spinster! Madam Ames, do you identify your husband’s writing?”

* * * * *

The frayed thread which Lady Grizel had painfully patched during so many years was broken. The sword under which she bravely tripped when her heart was aching, had come down and smitten her at last. Yet she stood stern and still and white, with hands crossed before her, the image of the marble queen of Palmyra in chains. But that her teeth were clenched, her nostrils distended, her eye opened wide and straining, there was no sign to

show that she was like a noble animal at bay. She recked not now of the excited crowd before her or the babel of many voices. Her thoughts were straying in the fields of memory, where she beheld an innocent young girl entrapped by dastardly cowards—blasted to suit their selfish ends. She breathed a bitter curse upon her wicked aunt—prayed fervently that Lord Bellasis might die of his wounds. Yet no! On second thoughts she withdrew the prayer. It was proven that she was Countess Bellasis. It was a crumb of comfort to think that Gladys could never have the wretch she whined for! Where was her only friend—her brother Jasper? He was gazing as one stunned upon old Hannah, who sat rocking, rocking, on the edge of the witnesses' platform, her mantle flung over her head, too mad, poor thing, to realise the company in which, by strange chance, she found herself. And yet she sat near those of her own degree, though they wore pearls whilst she was clad in rags. The ladies looked at the new-found peeress with intense interest. Their jaded appetites for scandal had not encountered so titillating a feast for ages. Ashe and Petersham vowed this to be more exciting than making love to highwaymen. Highwaymen! “Look at that gaunt, haggard, wild-looking man, who cannot keep his eyes from the old crone,” Stone whispered to them. “I know more of his life than he wots of! Lord Gowering he is

now—Scratchpole he was—the notorious terror of the road. It is like his impudence to show himself here. One day a highwayman—the next a peer. So runs this strange age of ours !” He might have added, one day a courtier, the next condemned for treason—for Mr. Grenville was at that very minute giving orders for his arrest. The strangeness of the King’s manner was patent to all. He would have to be shut up. Meanwhile, pending the establishment of a regency, ministers must bear their burthen. Lord Granby’s regiments were approaching the distracted city from all quarters. The insurrection which was shocking Europe was to be put down at the sword’s point. Stone, thanks to Lady Sarah’s bright eyes, would not be permitted to escape. Of that Mr. Grenville was resolved.

Jasper was so overwhelmed at discovering his mother in afflicted Hannah, that for a while he forgot his sister. Hannah ! Cambridge’s victim as he himself was. Wolfishly he watched the warden, who was fawning on all who would speak to him with an eye to protection in the future. Now there were additional reasons for wreaking vengeance on that villain. He should not escape him this time ! No. The last specks of his sand were dripping.

In the general hubbub the anxious Queen had conducted his Majesty into the royal pavilion, where he remained passively, while the lords gathered in knots to discuss the day’s proceedings. The trial

was come to an abrupt conclusion. There was nothing more to be said upon the subject. Her Grace, although unduchessed, was still a peeress, and could claim her peerage in arrest of punishment. An unfortunate scandal, of course, which must be hushed up as neatly as possible. That rabblement without was growing more and more noisy and insolent. Would it not be well to dissolve the commission?

It was long ere order was restored, yet all the while her Grace remained motionless, as though indeed she were transformed to marble.

“Look at the hussy!” cried triumphant Hannah More. “She’s going to faint.”

In truth her lips were blue, her eyes glazed, but she was not going to faint. My lords returned to their seats with renewed bends and bows, and Sergeant-at-arms, scowling awfully, made proclamation for silence. Then High Steward rose to his feet and said :

“Your lordships have heard the evidence; and the solemnity of your proceedings doth require that your lordships’ opinions on the question of guilty or not guilty should be delivered, severally, beginning with the junior baron. Is it your lordships’ will and pleasure to proceed now to give opinion upon the question of guilty or not guilty?”

Here all the lords solemnly nodded “Ay!”

Whereupon Lord Sundridge, standing in his

place uncovered, and laying his right hand upon his breast, answered : “ Guilty ! upon my honour !” as did all the rest in order.

Then spoke High Steward in sonorous accents, having Mr. Deputy-usher of the Black Rod upon his left : “ Madam, what have you to allege against judgment being pronounced against you ?”

A driving storm of snow darkened the casements.

The Duchess, pressing both hands upon her heart as if in pain, answered almost inaudibly : “ I claim my peerage according to the statutes.”

To which High Steward replied : “ Then, madam, you are discharged, paying your fees.”

So ended the solemn stage-play, in such manner as the chief actors in it dreamed not of when they dressed for their respective *rôles*. Jasper roused himself to help his sister from the pillory, on which she had stood without blenching throughout her ordeal. Looking in her face, he was startled at the expression of it, and was moving to the door to bid Nimming Ned fetch in her chair, when a clattering of horses and a shouting of men in the courtyard arrested his attention.

The rabble, as they swayed and jostled during their many hours of waiting in snow and sleet, were not rendered the more amiable thereby. News came that Ancaster and Tewkesbury Houses were in flames. This inspired them with courage. Their brethren were proving themselves brave fellows. They would

do likewise. As day darkened fresh crowds joined them. The two palace yards, the streets adjoining Westminster Bridge, the parks, were crammed as far as the eye could see with turbulent people. It was well that Lord Granby's regiments were on their way, for the mob was bent upon blockading Westminster Hall, allowing none to issue thence until some answer was obtained relative to grievances.

Now it was apparent to all within the Hall that it would not do for his Majesty to make promises with a knife, as it were, at his throat. It was of the first importance to get the King away, whatever the lords assembled might do afterwards. Orders were given, therefore, for the royal coach to draw up under cover of the soldiery, who were to surround and gallop off with it after the undignified fashion in which they had arrived. His Majesty appeared at the great door, where he was received with a storm of execration. For the first time the rabble lifted their hands against their sovereign, treating him to a shower of stones and mud such as was usually kept for the behoof only of my Lord Bute. That unlucky earl, seeing how his master fared, retreated from the entrance to where the worshipful one was weeping tears of fright. The Princess Dowager wrung her hands. Was she doomed then, after all, to see the dear master of deportment dragged limb from limb? The worshipful one manfully declined to take the favourite in his coach. It would be certain

death, he averred with truth. Lord Bute retired with the other peers by the back-way into the chamber of Parliament; while the worshipful one entered his coach as his Majesty drove off under a shower of missiles. But my Lord Mayor's prudence did not save him. In the blinding snow people took it for granted that Lord Bute was with him. Eager hands cut through the traces, smashed the door-lamps, windows, panels—dragged forth the worshipful one more dead than alive, and setting fire to his carriage, danced madly round it to the tune of “Wilkes and Liberty.” The Mayor himself was saved by the foot-guards, who battled for his body, though their numbers were too weak for a general onslaught.

The peers, who found themselves caged within the Parliament House, deliberated long and anxiously, sending out a message at last that all grievances would be remedied during the ensuing session. But this was not enough. Such an opportunity for terrorism might not occur again. The mob, emboldened by success, demanded Wilkes, a complete redress of complaints, the body dead or alive of my Lord Bute. To accept such terms was of course impossible. Old lords whimpering wished themselves comfortably buried. Young ones chafed at the insult to their order. Mr. Grenville wished (how ardently!) that he had never meddled with edged tools. What was to be done? London surely

never saw such troubles since the days of Cade ! The mob watched like wolves at all the entrances. There was no escape. Ladies trembled in frightened groups within Westminster Hall. The Duchess of Tewkesbury and Hannah alone were callous to what was passing.

A distant shriek—a clatter of hoofs and sabres. A yell and a stampede. What was it ? the Marquis of Granby's lambs. Colonel Coulson's regiment of heavy dragoons had arrived from Canterbury. The rescue was well-timed.*

* A letter exists written by Hannah More to Horace Walpole which gives an account of the Duchess of Kingston's trial in Westminster Hall. Hannah More was present at that extraordinary trial in company with her friend Mrs. Garrick ; and certainly a document which breathes a more unchristian spirit was never penned by one of the elect. Throughout she is jubilant over the discomfiture of a woman whom she hated.



CHAPTER XV.

LADY GRIZEL GOES HOME.



CHARGE of heavy cavalry scattered the vast mob as a puff of wind sends autumn leaves a-swirling. Weavers, pale and hollow-eyed, roared to each other to stand firm, but the female element, always so strong in crowds, melted their stern resolve. How can men, however desperate, bear to see their wives and little ones trodden under horses' feet? With threatening scowls they gave way and fled to the shelter of the tortuous streets about Westminster; then dismissing their women to the camp they re-formed, and rushing out with stones and sticks assembled again about the Parliament House, heaping on King and Government the curses of despair. Sir John Fielding, from a window, warned them to depart, declaring that if they would seek their homes in peace the godlike clemency of his Majesty might overlook the heinousness of their sins.

“Wilkes, Wilkes!” they cried; “give us the people’s tribune and Lord Bute’s body, and redress of grievances!”

Worthy Sir John was fain to retire in haste, for the painted glass above his head was shattered by a hundred missiles and fell in splinters on his velvet coat. An order was given for another charge; but this time the weavers stood shoulder to shoulder, stern-browed and resolute, tearing at the horsemen’s gear with fingers grown soft through lack of work; warding off as much as they might with oaken cudgels the sabre-blows which rained upon their pates. The breath of horses was hot upon them; foam from champed bits blinded their eyes; trampled down, they fell in rows together like corn before the sickle. From neighbouring alleys wives who had quietly strayed back again from camp at Southwark watched from sheltered nooks the conflict in the open square, gnawing their aprons and wailing. Jasper, too, was watching it with a sad heart from the gateway of Westminster Hall. The City of the Gallows was becoming the City of Gore. His heart sickened at the ghastly results of misrule.

The weavers occupied for a time the whole attention of the soldiery, who beat them back, despite a sullen resistance, across the recently-erected bridge of Westminster into the low-lying purlieus about Lambeth. Presently a second mob—drunk with wine and the successful pillage of the Bloomsbury

palaces—was seen approaching at a sharp trot past Whitehall; a mob composed of coal-whippers, thieves, dolly-pensioners, and social scum of all kinds. At their head waved a boot and petticoat, and they reeled along like mire-stained bacchanals, chanting as they went a ditty. Their faces were grimed with smoke, their dresses fluttered in shreds about them; sure they were demons broke loose from hell. At their approach the noble dames within the Great Hall cowered closely together, the doors were shut and barricadoed. From within could be heard a deadened shuffle on the thickly gathering snow, a muffled patter of many feet. Then the chorus burst out afresh. The jolly rioters were pirouetting round the ashes of my Lord Mayor's coach, picking out its springs and iron-work as convenient weapons of offence. Suddenly there arose above their fierce revelry a piercing shriek for mercy which caused the assembled ladies to scream in concert.

Jasper clambered on the hastily-built barricade to the chink above the door, and peeped out.

In the lowering twilight a wildly gesticulating crew of tatterdemalions were hustling something on the ground. Their bared arms worked like flails from out of sleeves that hung in strips; their lean unshaven faces were distorted by wildest passion. The lame, the crazed, the crippled, were there—blasted remnants of humanity—the flower of Jasper's army with which he had in vain attacked the Fleet.

Curiously he watched their movements, wondering what it was that could engross them so. Another shriek—fainter now—and yet another, fainter still. They straightened their bended backs and raised something aloft. A lithe figure in rags climbed on another's shoulders and reached upwards to where, projecting from a buttress, there stood a huge extinguisher of iron for the snuffing out of links. How heartily that figure worked. In a trice a rope was passed over the extinguisher, and looped and knotted; then something swung into the air with a quick jerk. Could it be a man that they were lynching? Yes, a man—or rather that which once had been a man—transformed now and battered into a bleeding shapeless mass. The mob gave a roar of triumph as the mass swayed for a brief while and then hung by its own weight motionless, and Jasper started as he looked through the chink. There was no mistaking that peculiar-coloured hair. It was Bambridge. His victims, who bore his mark upon them, had caught and slain him as he strove to steal away. Bambridge slain! Then the wrongs of Hannah were avenged, and not through her son's agency. What a pity! was his life to be quite useless after all? His heart tightened at the thought. Slowly, with a feeling of deep disappointment, Jasper descended from his point of vantage and returned to where Lady Grizel stood, as white and cold as Zenobia herself, who lay prone, a wreck, at home.

Discomfited by the dragoons, the scowling weavers spread themselves in knots about the town, determined at least to wreak vengeance upon such shops as belonged to mercers. Shutters were pulled down, doors dragged off their hinges, rich silks and laces scattered in the road. Luckless possessors of obnoxious wares crept under beds in upper chambers, contemplating impending slaughter as well as ruin; for a St. Bartholomew was inaugurated against all that was French; valets, cooks, friseurs, silk, lace. Nothing Parisian was to escape. If his Majesty would not listen to the prayers of his humble lieges they must even redress their own grievances in their own way. If other property was wasted, and innocent blood spilt—at his door must the crime lie; be his the future punishment.

Lord Granby's reinforcements released the captive peers and, after a brief tussle, completely routed the mob. My lords walked homeward (for carriages there were none), each one protected by a guard; chairs were fetched for the peeresses, who were nervous still for their jewels' sake. Some reached their dwellings unharmed. Some, less fortunate, were assailed at street corners by bands of rabble who hacked off mittens and stockings under pretence of their being French, divested the ladies of their ornaments as unnecessary baubles, and chalked 45 upon the chair-backs as a sign for their comrades that they had been already searched. My Lady

Grizel was passively placed in an hackney-chair by her brother, who strode before it towards Tewkesbury House, followed by the gang and by mad Hannah—how different a cavalcade from that which had started thence in the morning ! Snow was falling thickly, sheeting the way with felt. Darkness was coming on. Not a lamp twinkled in the purple of the gathering obscurity. No busy stir or hum of life. Cellars yawned here and there, their traps removed by passing brawlers—the City of the Gallows—the City of Blood—the City of the Dead ! Lady Grizel, unduchessed now, was going home for the last time to the ancestral palace wherein she had reigned so splendidly, which her marvellous beauty and wit had so adorned, which must now pass (a shattered casket deprived of its chief jewel) into the hands of the successful heir-at-law.

Since the falling of the sword of Damocles she had never spoken, but moved mechanically as one in sleep, the windows of whose mind are shut. She sank back in the sedan-chair with closed eyes, scarcely seeming to breathe. Her senses, bodily and mental, were numbed. So still was she that when the party was stopped by a band of wreckers, he who first peeped in bade the bearers proceed unmolested, remarking to his companions that it was but a body being carried to a dissecting-room. Indeed she looked very like a corpse, and showed no sign of life when Jasper at length lifted her out of the chair in

the dismantled hall of her old home. The aspect which it presented was almost enough to waken her even if she had been dead. The ancient porter lay stark across the threshold. The marble squares of the sumptuous pavement were chipped and cracked in veins by horses' hoofs, the priceless antique statues lay riven, the walls were blackened and corroded by fire. Window sashes flapped and bulged half-way from their frames, devoid of glass. Snow silently falling veiled the ruined gardens, the walks encumbered by splintered shrubs, the overturned tazze; covered the wreck of flitted grandeur with a kindly winding-sheet.

The house contained no living soul. In the gloom of twilight those crumbled figures on the tessellated floor looked like the remains of a murdered household. Lady Grizel thought so as she wistfully glanced at her own statue as Zenobia—headless, on its back—while Jasper and Nimming Ned carried her over the debris on the stairs to her own apartment.

Boaz and Ruth fluttered in ribands from Mr. Gibbons's crumbled cornice. The yellow withdrawing rooms yet smoked with recently extinguished fire. The flutes and cupids stood forth no longer in relief from sculptured panels. In their place yawned great scars and cicatrices as though comely skin had been rent away to expose smoking flesh beneath.

Their shoes crunching on broken glass and china,

their feet stumbling among limbless trunks of mangled furniture, the bearers of my Lady Grizel carried their burthen, marvelling sore, through the saloons wherein the wit of London had been wont to revel, vainly seeking for an unbroken seat in which to place her. The blue boudoir was sopping with murky water, showered in bucketfuls by the soldiers before they went away. The bedchamber, whose broidered quilt and curtains had cost a fortune, was a very shambles of slaughtered works of art. The melancholy *cortége* moved from room to room, like the bird that sallied from the ark, finding no haven of rest. Everywhere ruin—stern, complete, implacable. Penates ruined, household gods destroyed. The rising wind howled through shattered sashes, grimly stirring rags of gold brocade and torn tapestry, and shreds of damask hangings. The snow invaded her Grace's suite in eddies, whirling hither and thither in elfin sport, lying in compact heaps upon the floors—the soft snow thick and silent—while the red sun sank behind the trees into a lurid bed of vapour.

In the tiny powdering cabinet at the extreme end Nimming Ned found a fauteuil uninjured, and on it Lady Grizel was deposited, while Jasper wrapped his cloak about her as a screen against the wind. Hannah squatted down beside her on the floor, her mantle over her head, rocking, rocking, and moaning too, with the soul-distracting moan of a dog

that bays the moon, for the unwonted excitements of the day rendered the crazy crone more wandering and hysterical than usual. Now and then she removed a corner of the mantle furtively to look on her companion, then tossed it, growling, upon her head, and rocked again.

The gang distributed themselves over the mansion, ready for duty should Scratchpole whistle ; but their captain was little likely to need their services. Who but owls should invade such wreck ? who but bats should disturb this overwhelming ruin ? He was as stunned as was his sister by recent events, though from a different cause, and stood looking at her with lack-lustre eyes, while she sat idly as in a trance staring through the casement at the darkening landscape, the drifting snow, the nodding trees, the slowly-sinking sun.

Presently she shivered and looked round ; then closed her eyes again.

“ Cowardly rascals !” she whispered hoarsely. “ They dared not have wrought this mischief had I been here. Not that it matters. It is Meadows’ house now, not mine, and I wish him joy of it.” A faint smile flitted round her lips, then gave way to an expression of pain. “ Oh, Jasper, how shall I ever bear it ?” she murmured.

“ I will protect you. We will live together always,” returned her brother.

She shook her head impatiently.

“I don’t mean that,” she said. “Oh, how shall I ever bear it? It is not you, but I, who am the bastard after all! And I so pitied you for it, Jasper! Yet you were born to it. No. I cannot bear it!”

His sister drew the cloak with a weary movement closer about her neck, and fell into troubled sleep. Jasper sighed heavily as he turned to look upon his mother, who, with white hair spread over her face in dishevelled strands, was rocking, rocking.

“How unevenly are disposed the burthens!” he thought. “Of what trumpery tinfoil are fashioned the rewards!”

There rocked his mother, whose pensive baby face on ivory he had cherished through so many years of trial—a peeress truly, but a hopeless and dangerous lunatic. He was himself Lord Gowering. His lands would be reclaimed and given up to him; he would take his rightful place among the nobles of the land. Too late! The bend-sinister was branded on his heart; nothing might ever obliterate that scar. Who should repay him for those long years of unmerited anguish—who might give him now the light-hearted joyous youth which was his birthright? His brow was marked indelibly with the Fleet skull-cap; his limbs bore the imprint of the shears and screw. So did his mother’s, whose mind was distorted more than his. The only reparation which could have been made to him would have been

personal vengeance, complete and entire, upon the wretch who wrecked them both. Even that poor privilege he was denied ! For Bambridge—arch-miscreant—was lynched by others under his very eyes, whilst he who claimed above all the rest a right of revenge was mewed within the Hall of Westminster. Lord Gowering forsooth ! Unprized title ! unvalued wealth ! What mattered it now to him whether that bend-sinister were removed or not ? Had not harsh custom taught him to endure the chain ? What a culmination of barbarity it was to take it from him who recked no more of it, in order to crush another—the only thing he loved !

Lady Grizel stirred in fevered slumber and sighed heavily.

Footsteps on the stairs. Jasper hurried out to discover who the untoward intruders might chance to be. Three snuffy men in brown bob-wigs, who simpered and bowed, and mumbled “My lord” as they swept the marble with their hats. They were indeed most truly distressed to hear that her Grace was ungraced. The news had spread rapidly as such news does. It must be most distressing, and was in good sooth most marvellous. One gentleman essayed to weep, rubbing his single eye with a grimy finger, whereon glittered a portentous diamond in paste. Terribly distressing ! chorused the trio, but business was business, and they found themselves reluctantly compelled to intrude within

the abode of mourning, to learn who was to be responsible for the debts of the late Duchess.

“Gad’s my life!” chirped the concerned Cyclop in conclusion; “but the place is a ruin!”

“Sheriff’s officers!” ejaculated Jasper. “Birds of prey already? If ye know this much, then must ye needs know more. Ye will have been informed that I, her Grace’s brother, am the true Lord Gowering. On my honour as a British peer, I will hold myself responsible for her Grace’s debts, provided you go at once.”

The men bowed lower than ever, and cringingly retired. It was deemed likely that the chivalrous brother would act as he had done, but it was considered politic to test him with as little delay as possible.

He thought no more of the incident, and returned to the powdering cabinet where his sister, aroused by voices from her stupor, was drumming with her fingers on the seat.

“*Late* Duchess!” she muttered fiercely. “*Late* Duchess indeed! Not dead yet, my fine fellows. The blow was very sharp, but I am better now. By-and-by I shall do charmingly. Lord Gowering’s daughter is made of stubborn stuff.” Then she relapsed into silence, and sat brooding with knitted brows. At length she rose and paced the dismantled drawing-room, crushing broken glass under her dainty shoe. Up and down she paced in

the moonlight, as she had done only a few weeks before when the Duke died. A few weeks—a century !

“Lord Gowering’s daughter—Lord Gowering’s daughter,” she kept repeating. “Lord Gowering’s *bastard* ! That is the hardest stroke of all. Anagke the relentless hath run me down—curses on her !”

The tall black figure in its rustling sables stalked up and down like the caged ghost of the Penates, its diamond coronet glinting in the moonbeams ; and Hannah, withdrawing her mantle at the repetition of the name, watched her movements greedily with unblinking gaze and set teeth. The hag looked very mad to-night as she crouched in her corner ; but none heeded her.

Lady Grizel walked muttering long after the sun had gone to rest. Her face was drawn and very pale ; her large fine hands were clasped across her bosom ; her eyes were unnaturally bright. Up and down she swept—a noble spectre.

A man crossed the courtyard, and stepping over the body of the prostrate porter made his way over the *débris* on the staircase. Jasper met him, and would have barred his passage, but rushing past he said, “I must, I will speak to the Countess Bellasis !”

Lady Grizel winced at the name, and proudly confronted him.

“You !” she said with scorn. “A brave thing

in a man to gloat over—the writhings of a beaten woman. All I have is yours, I know. I will depart at dawn. Till then, at least, leave me in peace."

"I do assure you, madam, that you are mistaken," stammered Mr. Meadows in confusion. "I heard of the sacking of the house, and being truly grieved for your sad position, came to see if I could be of service. Your ladyship's pain quite wipes away all sweets of victory. Your brother here will tell you that I am not a hard man. Indeed I never should have moved in the matter at all, but for the egging on of Wilkes and Stone. By the way, friend, I am told that the chief agent in the destruction of this house was one Sim Ames, my Lord Bute's bully and Stone's spy. With him we have to reckon, also with Stone. A fine friend hath he been to me, destroying my house and goods," went on Meadows with a touch of annoyance. "Again I crave your pardon, madam. Nay! I am gone."

"I feel strangely faint," murmured Lady Grizel. "My heart flutters. I could drink a glass of my fine Madeira if those ruffians have not made away with it. Go and see, Jasper. After will I sleep. To-morrow indeed shall I do charmingly again."

She moved towards the Chinese cabinet which contained the only unmangled chair, but was fain to accept the proffered arm of the heir-at-law, keeping her other hand tight pressed upon her bosom. He helped her to the seat, where she sat staring at

the snow as it swirled in through the broken windows, and, unwilling to appear to watch her, turned away and leaned against the casement-frame.

Hannah had not budged for hours ; but now, impelled by a wild fancy, she crawled forward on her knees. She wanted to look more closely at Lord Gowering's daughter. The same hungry glare was in the old woman's face which had so shocked Deborah on the dreadful night at Sot's Hole. Stealthily, like a snake, she drew herself along in the shadow, and with an insane gurgle rose and twined her long fingers about Lady Grizel's throat—locked them together tight and kept them there. Meadows, conscious of a strange sound, turned round, and beheld, to his horror, the two women battling in the uncertain light. With a shout to Jasper he strove to disengage them, fighting with the mad-woman, who clung with the tenacity of a bull-dog to her prey. Lady Grizel clutched the air with white aimless hands. In the scuffle her diamond coronet became detached and rolled away upon the hearth.

Meadows, half beside himself with terror, tussled against the strength which is given to the insane, calling loudly on the hag to loose her hold.

“ She is mine ! she is mine !” hissed the crone in frenzy ; “ give her to me—the daughter of her who supplanted me—the child of him who betrayed me. Her father was without pity. Give her to me, for she is mine !”

Jasper, who was searching in vain in a distant cupboard, heard the uproar, and his heart was chilled by a foreboding of evil. Returning in haste to the powdering-cabinet, he wrenched the mad-woman away, who, obedient to the spell which he always exerted over her wandering intellect, sat quietly down again, tossing her mantle on her head.

Lady Grizel lay back without movement, as white as the snow which fluttered on her dress through the windows. Her lips were slightly parted. She evidently breathed with pain. Presently her hand sought Jasper's; feebly she motioned to him to bend down his head.

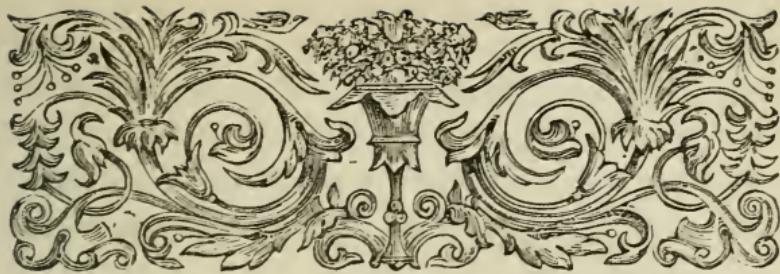
“Anagke!” Her blue lips formed the word, and, smiling, she closed her eyes.

The old woman sat monotonously rocking while the two men watched beside the chair, till the grey glamour which precedes the dawn came shuddering into the chamber. Jasper dreamed as he leaned against the wall of that other night, when the will was signed which dispossessed the rightful heir. That will was waste-paper now. The only being whom he loved was ruined and undone. Yet did she sleep peacefully a long deep sleep, which the young sun, shining full on her eye-lids, failed to disturb. Surely, he thought, she would rally yet; and the two would leave England for the world of promise beyond seas. It was a long journey, which should repay the fatigue of the voyage. Yes. The

stroke had been swift and terrible, but the masculine courage which usually characterised my Lady Grizel would doubtless weave anew the torn strands of her being if the fluttering spirit were only granted rest. She was not a woman to succumb under “the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,” however sudden the flight of the winged shaft.

The sun rose as murkily from his bed of vapour as he had sunk into it. Still the men watched; still Lady Grizel slept.

Jasper was wrong in his calculations. His sister had indeed started on a long and painful journey; but she was doomed to travel on her way alone. Hannah’s brooding revenge of years was satisfied; for Lady Grizel lay dead when morning broke—in the prime of her glorious beauty, with scorn upon her face.



CHAPTER XVI.

THE TOWERS ARE CLOUD-CAPPED.



R. GRENVILLE had his hands full. His importance was unlimited, so was his power, so (alas for him !) was his incompetence and his responsibility. The bat had flapped about the hoary old ivy-grown turret of the British constitution, and, much to his surprise, more than mere dust was falling on his furry pate. He occupied the perch whereon the eagle had once plumed himself, but the perch was showing signs of cracking beneath his weight. Though a bat, purblind, busied with the greasing of his pinions, yet was he at least a British cheiropter, a stranger to defeat. Greatly did Mr. Grenville chuckle over the results of his Macchiavellian policy at Westminster. But for his sagacity and my Lord Granby's promptitude, his most gracious Majesty would certainly have been maltreated ; half the heirloom jewels of Eng-

land would have passed into the hands of ruffians ; many innocent lives would have been lost. True ; many lives were unhappily sacrificed by the military. Many of the rioters were trampled ; many crowns were broken. But, argued Mr. Grenville, the lives of these could not be termed innocent ; for no guiltless persons had any right to be among the rioters. Ergo, those who fell might be looked upon as guilty —as perquisites of Jack Ketch who were mean enough to shirk hanging. Up to this moment there could be no doubt that the Londoners had behaved abominably. The middle-classes, swayed by sordid love of pelf, were content to barricade their domiciles and call upon Government to save them. The nobles shared with King, cabinet, and favourite an execration which was edifying from its intensity ; the lower orders, despising such awful moral lessons as the solemn burning of a newspaper on a gibbet, absolutely cast decorum to the winds and matriculated quite respectably as professional cut-throats. The King was all for merciful measures. Capricious and obstinate, soft and harsh, by turns, he was impracticable. Mr. Grenville was quite glad when the curtain whose shadow had saddened the young monarch with vague apprehensions, wrapped him at last in its folds ; when it became evident, beyond possibility of concealment, that George III. was going mad. Unhappy George ! Unfortunate prince ! For him the golden chalice brimmed with aloes. Mr. Pitt,

the stern Commoner, ruthlessly tampered with his boyish heart-strings for the public good. “ He will recover so trifling an operation,” had observed the ascetic patriot with disdain. He did recover, in part ; might have become altogether whole if the very fruitlessness of his sacrifice had not torn open his wounds again and again afresh. His people loathed him, his ministers browbeat him, Grenville was proved to be a monument of incompetence. If the latter toppled, what chance for his master ? The Whig oligarchy of noble tyrants, from whom Bute had freed him, would swoop down, would fetter him hand and foot. Then, no slave so abject as the King of England.

But a merciful Providence veiled half the King of England’s troubles from his ken. Surely the apprehension of insanity is a gruesome thing—the terror of one who knows that he is no longer master of himself, that his intellect is slipping from the girdle of his will. Yet even so awful a calamity may come to be a boon. For how many of us is Lethe the supreme goddess. How many of us would gladly barter the joys of a possible heaven against a certainty of oblivion and unbroken peace ? The King was but half conscious of the insults heaped upon him on the day of the great trial. Visions haunted him of furious fists, of curses, of flying stones and garbage, of the Queen in tears. Arrived at Buckingham House, behind whose

lofty walls it was deemed best to secure him, he was put to bed, where he lay, 'twixt sleeping and waking, many days. He knew not of ominous despatches from America, which indignantly upbraided King and council for broken faith, oaths disregarded, promises ignored. He knew not that a regency was spoken of as inevitable unless he speedily became himself again. He knew not that London was calm —with the calm of a capital sacked and held in durance. Yet so it was. The young man in a red waist-coat who had been murdered in mistake for Sim Ames was carried with much pomp and many banners to his grave. Forty thousand people plodded behind his nameless coffin in eloquent protest against the murder of the unarmed by an armed force. As many as could reach the spot bent down to kiss the earth and register a malediction against the King and his advisers. As Roman Catholics touch brow and breast in memory of the Arch-martyr, so they crossed themselves in the form of forty-five. Wilkes was their martyr, the symbol of an oppressed people, whose sons were crying for their fathers, whose mothers were wailing for their sons. Did he, Wilkes, not speak burning truths? did he not for the sake of his countrymen (flesh of his flesh, bone of his bone) boldly denounce the favourite, the nobles, the whole system of misrule, regardless of personal consequences? What mattered his private life? His public life was that of a martyr to a

sacred cause—the cause of Liberty and an oppressed people. As might have been expected, he was flung into a dungeon—into the Tower, the scene of so many tragedies. But would the citizens of London bear this crowning act of tyranny? No! They would claim their champion despite my lord of Granby's lambs. Vast crowds assembled about the Tower-gates on the day following the trial; but Mr. Grenville, not to be coerced, instantly retaliated by issuing a proclamation thanking the soldiers for their services, and commanding all loyal tradesmen to keep their 'prentices within doors.

This fresh blunder roused popular anger to its highest pitch. Bedford House was set on fire; other mansions were pillaged; Anarchy settled herself for a long reign. But the King's well-meaning authority was no more, his influence was gone. As he tossed upon his pillows in his darkened room, Lord Granby's lambs were let loose upon the mob. They no longer smote with the flat of the sabre or killed a few brawlers by accident. London was to leave off raging; to tire her head, to clothe herself decently, to be once more in her right mind. In two days she was quiet and collected enough to all appearance—aye, and clothed withal. What mattered it that her robe was stiff with blood? Mr. Grenville was resolved to show that he could master the scum. His Majesty, if ever he became himself again, would thank him for his decision of character.

Even stern Mr. Pitt, whom the King moaned of in his delirium, could not more uncompromisingly have crushed a revolt. Mr. Grenville, always short-sighted, failed to see that if the Great Commoner had not himself been prostrate, so serious a rioting would surely have been averted.

George Grenville and Lord Bute were in deep consultation in the King's ante-chamber. The former was warmly explaining his projects, and begging the powerful assistance of the favourite. But the Scotch Earl was an altered man. His faults were superficial ones, due to vanity. He had looked a frightful death in the very eyes, and was resolved finally to have done with politics.

“No!” he said, shaking his head sadly, “I am more hated than any man in Europe, though I always acted for the best. I am disgusted with England and the English. Look at this, which I found pinned to my powdering cloth this day :

“‘Scotch traitors, who, for love of gold,
Would sell their God as once their King they sold.’

These insults are showered on me daily. I dare not show my face in public, I, who have adored the Royal Family !”

“One member of it too much, maybe,” thought Grenville, though he said nothing.

“I shall leave England at once, to end my days in cultured ease and contemplation at Venice, where I possess a palace.” The old Adam was yet strong

in my Lord Bute, who turned his toe as he spoke, and shook his ruffle, as though the poor infatuated Princess had been there, to drink in the manifold beauties of his figure. “Why should I stop here?” he continued, mournfully arching his brows. “Nobody wants me, not even the King, who now, alas! needs nothing but a keeper. I can count my friends upon one hand, and none of them want my assistance. Now that the madcap Duchess is gone (she was a pretty creature, if unduly wild), her widower will, of course, marry Lady Gladys. Dear heart! what odd marriages do people contract, and how those who would have jogged along pleasantly as friends, hate each other without wotting why, so soon as the knot is tied!”

In sooth the favourite’s knot never galled him much, for my Lady Bute abode alone in the country, like a dutiful wife, jogging twice to church of a Sunday, with Christian humility, in her crazy old coach, worrying her lord not at all.

“Her Grace’s brother, too, the new Lord Gowering! I am glad he has received a pardon for his past offences.”

“We could not do less,” rejoined Grenville sagely. “His unmerited sufferings drove him to recklessness. Besides, one trial in the family has proved more than enough!” The two courtiers smiled at the merry conceit, and exchanged snuff-boxes.

A curtain behind them moved. The sad young Queen appeared in a doorway, and beckoned them to follow. Poor lady ! what mattered it now that the casket which contained her heart was square, that her nose was red and swollen, and her eyes blood-shot ? The loyal heart was full of grief, the eyes of tears, for George, whom she had learned to love, was racked with mental torment, and babbled things which were daggers in her breast.

“ No politics,” she said firmly. “ He cannot bear worry yet. He certainly is better ; his brain clears. Please God he will mend. Hush !”

The King sat up in bed, with a flushed visage, dimly visible in the artificial twilight—looming from among laces and white-broidered furniture, a wild figure, with long dank hair uncombed, and nervous sinewy young arms.

“ Hist ! Pitt !” he whispered, “ is he come ? He begged me on his knees to love America, to take her to my bosom as an erring child. See, I am ready. I will forgive all. Gently will I chide her for her waywardness. Am I not King and father of my people ?”

“ I rejoice, sir,” began Lord Bute, clearing his throat, “ that you do so well. I feared——”

“ Bute ! away !” shuddered the King, cowering among his pillows. “ They cursed me, Bute ! and flung stones and mud at me. At *me* ! who sacrificed my heart for them. Sarah, my own Sarah !

where is she? Bring her to me. I will grovel at her feet till she deigns to pardon. Sarah, pardon! My first, my only love!"

He fell back exhausted, with a cold sweat upon his brow. The Queen buried her face on a sofa, and wept the leaden tears which sear the heart.

The two courtiers looked at one another uncomfortably, and remained mute. A muffled sound became audible below—a sound as of wagons passing with a heavy load. From the windows of the chamber a view could be obtained of the road beyond the garden walls; of the road leading from Westminster towards the Mall and Piccadilly. His Majesty moved uneasily and wiped his brow. "That sound once more, like a dull pulse of pain—so often! what is it?" No one answered. He sprang from his bed, parted the curtains, and looked forth. Four wagons were jogging northward filled with people, some talking and laughing, some in prayer, many stolid and resigned. Jack Ketch, in his well-known uniform, bestrode the foremost horse. A few foot-soldiers straggled in rear of the procession.

The King staggered and dropped the curtains. "What is this?" he demanded hoarsely. "Men and women on the road to Tyburn—by fifties at a time? Is this accursed land to lap all its children's lives? My God! my God! I am responsible for them to Thee! Is it Thy will that their blood should drown me? Nay! I am absolved in Thy exceeding

mercy. For my mind flutters like a bird in space, I grope in darkness, and can no longer guide myself."

Clasping his hands about his head, he turned eagerly to Mr. Grenville, and asked for news of Pitt.

The minister was dumb. Lord Bute answered, sighing, "Mr. Pitt sits at Hayes, in a darkened room, hovering on the confines of two worlds. His giant intellect is already withered. Now that it is too late, I recognise his worth and my own littleness. Yet the greatness of such a man is not without its disadvantages. When his face is hidden, his whole system is on a sea without chart or compass. His mariners, deprived of his guiding influence, are the sport of every gust—are whirled——"

There is no knowing how fine a period the pompous Earl would have turned in his contrition; but his effect was spoilt, for his Majesty sank down inert upon the floor, and murmuring, "Then England is lost!" relapsed into unconsciousness.



CHAPTER XVII.

THE LAST.

GR. GRENVILLE spoke truth when he said that Scratchpole had received a free pardon. It is not a good example, as he himself said, whilst rubbing his chin, for lords who turn highwaymen to escape scot-free. What will those pestilent lower lieges think of it, he ruminated, if we continue to string up the cobblers, and at the same time shake hands with peers who openly flout the laws? But there were circumstances connected with Lord Gowering's case (as the most wrong-headed were forced to admit) which rendered it meet that in this instance bygones should be bygones. He received a pardon then. Not so his late associates. Lord Granby's troops swept up the scum like a besom of retribution, handing over to Mr. Ketch, who was miserably over-worked, weavers, dolly-pensioners,

petticoat-captains, coal-whippers, thieves, what not ? Nimming Ned was promised a pardon if any maid in white would appear at the gallows'-foot and take him for a husband ; but unfortunately he was already married, which complicated the business, and so he (a warning to Benedicts) suffered. So did Marjoram and Ted Barker, the rogue horse-breaker, whose horrid career I will tell to you some day, and all the rest.

Sim Ames, deserted by the gang, felt himself stranded. He had striven to serve two masters, and reaped the inevitable reward accorded to such gentry. Yet did he not lose heart. He skulked about for a while in alternate fits of fool-hardiness and caution. Even if taken, his old patron, Lord Bute, would surely intercede for him ; or my Lord Gowering, the newly-discovered peer. Meanwhile it might be well to be circumspect—to go into the country, to lie *perdu* for awhile, until Lord Granby's lambs were relegated to their fold.

But he reckoned without his host—or rather without Sir John Fielding, whose professional pride was on its mettle, whose agents had mingled with the mob in their orgies, and learned the haunts of the ringleaders.

Sim Ames was betrayed—as most men have been betrayed, from Samson downwards—by Delilah. Yes ; Delilah did it. One evening she was more perfidiously loving than usual, after the fashion of

the sex, which evidently claims the cat as protoplasm. She purred and veiled her claws, and took his surtout from him, the large flap pockets of which contained his pistols. With many a smirk she proceeded to engage the attention of her temporary lord with pancakes, having previously locked the back-door of the blind ale-house where they dwelt—a door which was usually left open in case of a surprise. Then retiring to draw some beer, she pretended to lock the front door after her for his security, but purposely missed the staple.

A signal was given to Sir John's myrmidons, who were in waiting, and who, having drained a tankard or two at Sim's expense, bore him off to the Wood Street Compter, whence he was transferred to Newgate. Certain of succour from one influential friend or another, he feared nothing, although he was without money. The turnkeys expected from so well-looking a gentleman a handsome garnish ; but disappointed in their hopes, they weighted him with irons according to his parsimony, and left him in the wine room, where of a morning such prisoners as were not penniless were wont to sip jorums of rum and milk. Here, at the mercy of shoals of pick-pockets, his clothes were rent from off him, and he was speedily in rags. Many letters did he write to my Lords Gowering and Bute—in vain. He was condemned to be hanged. His thumbs were tied together, as was the usual cere-

mony, and he was already looked upon by all, except himself, as dead. Still lost he not his courage. On a certain morning he remarked a large beetle creeping on the pavement, amid the ironed feet of the felons who crowded the prison quadrangle. The object of the insect appeared to be to gain the end of the yard, which it approached sometimes in a straight line, sometimes with circumvagrant windings. Sim Ames watched the cautious motion of the insect with absorbing interest, seeming to see in it an omen of his own fate ; and a warder, curiously looking over his shoulder, demanded what he did.

“Suffer him to reach the gate,” implored Sim, “for he hath made many narrow escapes.”

“Damn your escapes !” returned the gaoler. “Even a blackbeetle shall not escape from Newgate.” So saying, he instantly trod the silly wanderer to death.

Now Sim gave himself up for lost. He rallied his wives around him, procured from them a new suit of garments (hearing that he was to be hung in chains), and, suspense over, stepped gaily into the cart which was to carry him to his gallows, opposite the ruins of Tewkesbury House. His end was edifying to all beholders. He wore an elegant scarlet frock, a white vest, black satin breeches ; his hair carefully powdered. Upon each leg were two iron links, decorated with tasteful festoons of sky-blue

ribbon ; a rich posy adorned his breast. Merrily observing, "Here I am at last—this is better than starvation," he bowed to the multitude and sprung lightly from the ladder (as you may read if you will in Mr. Johnson's history).

* * * * *

Mr. Wilkes looked out from his cell in the Tower of London, and dropped from his stiff fingers the pen with which he had been inditing idylls to his little daughter—innocent lyrics redolent (although the time was winter) of field-flowers and new-mown hay. The tribune of the people was content, for fatuous Grenville martyrised him to the top of his bent. He saw before him a future of persecution meekly borne which should lead to fortune. Already admirers were subscribing large sums for their pet patriot. Fellow-prisoners took heart, murmuring, "Wilkes being with us, Liberty cannot be far off." Ladies big with child felt a longing to see Wilkes, vowing that if he would bless them, their offspring should be christened John or Joan.

With a grin which displayed all his black teeth, the tribune took up his pen again, thinking with regret of the many years wasted ere he bethought himself to turn patriot. "When shall the rod of ministerial tyranny be broken?" he wrote with unction. "Let their lordships maltreat me as they will, tortures shall wring nothing from me. I pray Heaven to forgive those who prejudge me guilty of

publishing a poem which I concealed with the greatest care. None but a Stuart or a Grenville could achieve the refinement in tyranny of robbing a closet to convert a private frolic into a state crime. I am the people's servant. God hath given me firmness and fidelity."

He stopped with a laugh, for he reflected that his own periods were only one shade more false and empty than my Lord Bute's had been. As his eye wandered over the picturesque prospect from his prison window, it lighted on a gentleman in deep mourning, who was stepping into a boat at Tower Stairs, and was apparently bidding farewell to another. He knew them, though he could not hear their talk. They were Jasper and Meadows.

* * * * *

Though Wilkes could not hear what was said, we may.

"Yes," Jasper was saying sombrely, "I am leaving this unhappy country, and pray God that I may never see it more! for it is connected in my mind with so dire a string of miseries as fall rarely to one man's lot. You wish to keep me. Why? There is really nought to hold me here. My sister hath found peace. Those who tracked her down lie under ban of treason—out of my reach—and will suffer without help of mine. Sim Ames hangs at Tewkesbury cross-roads. My poor mother is in tender hands at Castle Gowering. Bambridge rots under-

ground. Upon no single one of our enemies may I wreak vengeance. Alas!"

"It is God's mercy that it should be so," returned Meadows with a warm hand-clasp of sympathy. "Your good heart hath been warped by the buffets of the world. A noble nature when in health finds no joy, believe me, in wreaking vengeance. It seeks rather to shame Fate by showering kindness on fellow-sufferers, in increasing ratio with its own misfortunes. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord. Jasper, dear friend, God hath in mercy taken from your hand a weapon which befits it not."

"I used to think so," mused Jasper, "when I was in America. Such was Wolfe's doctrine; such noble Washington's. With my return to England my evil angel resumed his sway over my soul. It is well that I should go, for a curse hangs upon this land and all upon it. Wilkes, in whom I once believed, is a mere windbag—a crafty, unprincipled, selfish schemer. England hath but one hero, who, men say, is dying. The Great Commoner lies sick at Hayes. His reason has toppled down, as hath his Majesty's. Bute is exiled, Grenville has resigned. Grafton or Rockingham or North will essay to take the helm. America is bursting into flame from end to end. Great Britain smoulders. What a lesson of human glory to Europe is this sudden collapse! Five years ago we were the terror of the world—and now! There is a low shivering

mutter of swiftly-coming trouble like the white lashing of the ocean's surface at birth of a storm-cloud. How shall England weather the tempest?"

Meadows shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

"Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall! If you will go, farewell then, my Lord Gowering. Will you never return home?"

Jasper pointed sternly with his finger to the horizon. After a pause he said dreamily, "Perhaps; when that shameful row of gibbets shall have vanished from Thames Bank—when London shall have ceased to be the 'City of the Gallows!'"



L'ENVOI.



CERTAIN eminent dramatist, and valued friend of mine, received rough handling from critics upon the production of several of his admirable historical plays, "because he dared to tamper with history;" as though it were possible to treat romantically events which have actually taken place without a coaxing of such stubborn strands as refuse to be woven into pattern. I remarked to him at the time, for his comfort, that a satisfactory precedent for such tampering could be found by looking back no farther than sixty years ago. Sir Walter Scott was guilty of many crimes of the sort; and, surely, when the lion has trodden down the brushwood, the worm may wriggle in his track without fear of harm. I am told that the next best thing to repenting of one's sins is to confess them; therefore do I humbly make confession as follows :

George Grenville and Lord Bute were not wholly

responsible for the misrule of England from the fall of Pitt to the assumption of power by Lord Rockingham. The Dukes of Bedford and Newcastle, and others, did their fair share of the broth-stirring; but I deemed it permissible to leave their ghosts in peace, to avoid the confusion of an over-crowded canvas. For the same reason, at the commencement of the tale, I ignored the administration of Pelham and ante-dated that of his brother, Newcastle. As in the course of the story we were forced to touch upon at least four changes of ministry, I judged it prudent, for the sake of clearness, to make no mention of a minister who would only appear to disappear. What I have aimed at giving is a truthful *impression* of a strangely corrupt and stormy period, not a minutely-detailed history of political blunders and ministerial shortcomings—a faithful picture of society as it was a hundred years ago, with its singular tone of thought, its cruelty, its ignorance, and wickedness.

The sketch of the Fleet Prison is in nowise exaggerated; the portrait of Bambridge is not too darkly painted. Unhappily for poetic justice, the only detail which is false concerning him is the manner of his death. He came to no violent end; but although tried and found guilty, managed, probably by judicious bribery, to escape the hangman, merely being sentenced to resign his post of warden of the prison.

To the manes of Andrew Stone I owe many apologies. For aught I know to the contrary, his behaviour may have been that of the proverbial angel of light. But Horace Walpole says that Prince George's tutor was "dark and secretive." Now we all know that if people who are dark and secretive are not villains, they ought to be; therefore (as I wanted a genteel villain badly) I took it for granted that he was a rascal of the deepest dye, and trust that his vengeful spirit may never entice me to a dark *séance*, there to have my head battered by the tambourine of retribution. I do not much dread such a contingency though; for experience teaches that the spirits who prowl on earth are neither useful nor ornamental, nor even specially spiteful. Nevertheless, I take this opportunity of apologising and of stating that my Andrew Stone is a fictitious personage in all respects, save the "health-drinking," for which piece of folly the real Andrew Stone got himself into hot water.

The story of Lady Grizel is remotely founded upon the strange career of Elizabeth Chudleigh, Duchess of Kingston. I have not attempted to reproduce that lady's character (it would not bear reproduction upon the clean pages of a decent romance), but have contented myself with hanging such portions of her history as seemed picturesque upon a peg of my own carving.

I am not aware that Lady Sarah Lennox—Prince

George's early flame—ever had a sister who would answer the description of the “mawkin Gladys.”

My illustrations of the singular social position of “Collectors on the Highway” are drawn from contemporary Bow Street records, and an exhaustive pamphlet, published by John Fielding, in 1755, entitled “A Plan for Preventing Robberies within Twenty Miles of London.” For many curiously minute details of fashion and fashionable life during the middle of the last century, I am indebted to “Walpole’s Correspondence,” “Chrysal,” the “Connoisseur,” the “Spy,” a “History of London Clubs and Taverns,” the “Gentleman’s Magazine,” and a host of ephemeral poems and pamphlets of the day, stray copies of which are yet to be met with lurking on remote shelves of cobwebbed libraries.

The singular mode of the “Capriole” is the text for an elaborate discourse, which occupies the entire 74th number of the “Connoisseur,” A.D. 1767.

Wandering one day in Westminster Abbey, my attention was attracted to a young couple who were gazing vacantly at Lord Chatham’s monument—a bovine, countrified young man, and a pretty girl with the inquiring expression of a sparrow. Evidently a newly-married couple. The bride was respectfully imbibing instruction from the marital fount. I drew near, for honeymooning people have a particular attraction for me. One always wonders

how soon they will begin to fight ; how soon Jane will marvel what she ever saw in Tom ; how soon Tom will discover that Jane's lovely auburn locks are “carrots !”

“Who was Lord Chatham, pet ?” the pretty girl was asking.

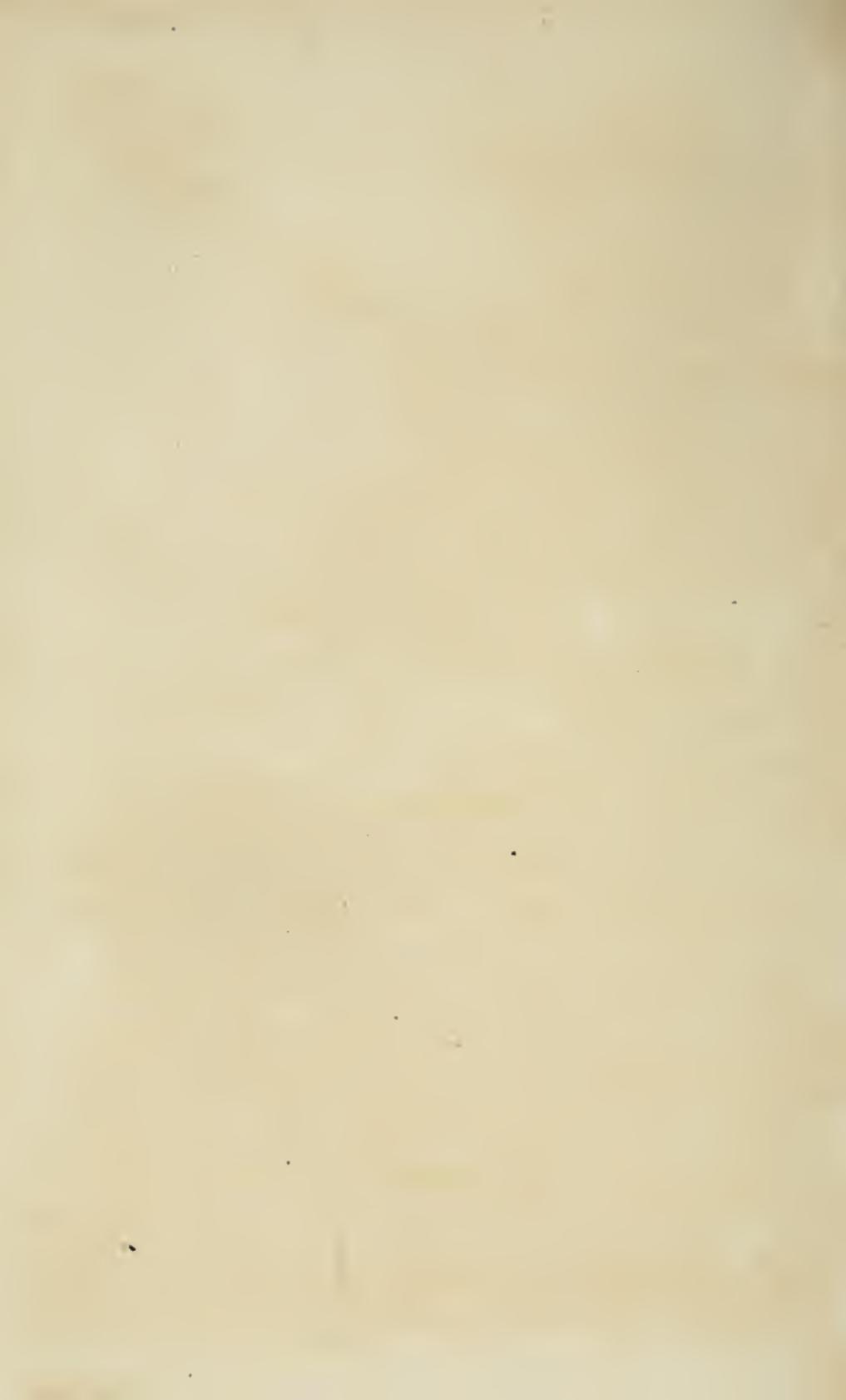
“Oh ! the father of William Pitt, love,” returned the husband with condescension.

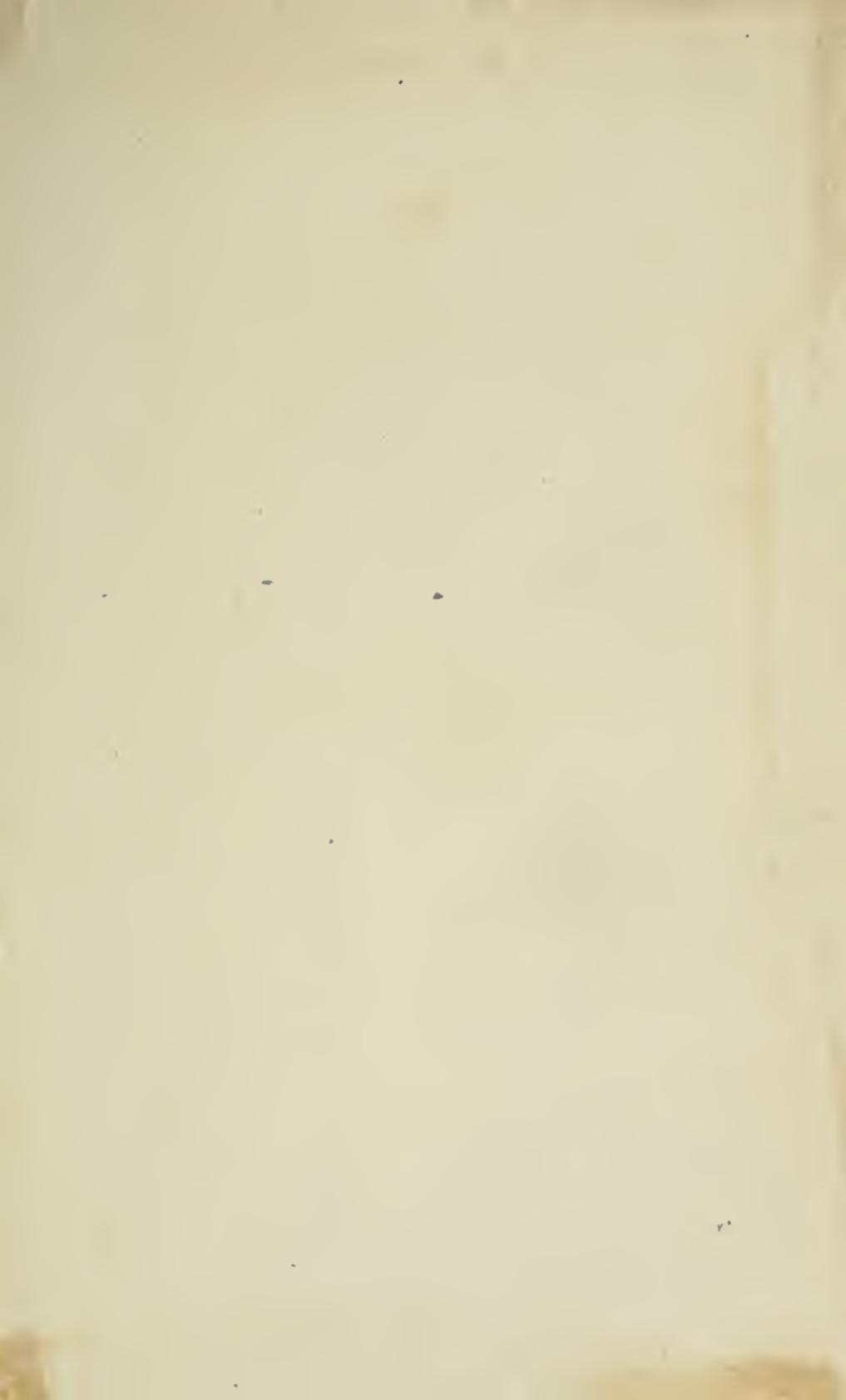
Now there is no denying that William Pitt, Lord Chatham, was the father of William Pitt the second. But he was more than that. I have humbly endeavoured to throw a meek blossom on his tomb ; and if the bovine young man and the sparrow-like young woman should chance to take up this book, and be tempted thereby to study for themselves the life of the Great Commoner—to ponder over his speeches, to admire, through his letters, the stern, pure beauty of his character—they will, I am sure, forgive me for having written “Lady Grizel.”

One hint at parting to the bovine youth and his consort afore-mentioned. The Great Commoner died Earl of Chatham—*ergo*, he recovered from the grievous illness which clouded his faculties during several months in 1765, and survived to thunder forth wisdom clothed in eloquence on the subject of the Great American War of Independence.

THE END.

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